

# Sketch

COMIC BOOK

AND TECHNIQUES

## Keepin' Your Ego in Check

Tom Bierbaum

## Drawing Questions & Answers

Mitch Byrd

## Making Comics Easy

Darren Mueller

## Inking a Commission

Bob Almond

## Creating a Sketch Card

Geo C.

## The Artist Process

Nate Lovett

#39

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# ADAM HUGHES

interview

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## A note...

This issue featuring Adam Hughes is one of the most requested issues of Sketch that we have produced in a long time. With that said, I'm a huge fan of Adam's artwork. His layouts, line art and colors are the top in the industry. We are lucky that Adam had time in his schedule to do an interview with us.

Last issue I mentioned that I've been involved with a new company called comicsXP.com. I wanted to update everyone that we have launched the CXP Reader Beta. It's a free reader for anyone to download and read comics. The comicsXP store will be launching in April. Interested in having your comics distributed online? Stop by [www.comicsxp.com](http://www.comicsxp.com). The publisher/creator contracts are available for review. You'll find it's a contract that protects creator rights. (I wouldn't offer a contract I wouldn't be willing to sign.) If you have any questions please contact us.

So what's next for Sketch Magazine? (Glad you asked.)

We are currently planning the next years worth of issues. Bill and I are discussing cover features and we have a great group of talented creators contributing articles. [Sketchmagazine.net](http://Sketchmagazine.net)'s editor John Wilson offers creators additional how-to articles that are found on the web. And of course we are adding digital distribution of all issues. Now a back issue will never be out of print.

The future of Sketch looks bright!

Take care,

Robert W. Hickey





Artwork by Adam Hughes

## Adam Hughes

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The Process by Nate Lovett



# Inside This Month . . .



## Robert W. Hickey

Along with his duties as publisher of Sketch Magazine, he is the creative force behind *Blood & Roses*, *StormQuest*, *Tempered Steele* and *Race Danger*. He currently has a new Blood and Roses project in the works that will be appearing at SKYSTORMONLINE.COM. Bob is one of the co-founders of Blue Line Art and Afterburn Media LLC. Founder of ComicsforCures.com, Co-Founder of comicsXP.com.

## Bill Nichols

As editor of *Sketch Magazine*, Bill welcomes the chance to educate and help other pros to pass along their hard-earned knowledge of All Things Comic Book. Bill has inked for Knight Press (*StormQuest*, *Blood and Roses*, *Dead Kid Adventures*), Caliber Press (*Raven Chronicles*, *LegendLore*, *Magus*) and others. As co-publisher of SkyStorm Studios, Bill is excited to be working on some old favorites and some new stories, as well as bringing life to his own Sparta Bay project.



## Tom Bierbaum

Tom, with wife Mary, has scripted such comics as Legion of Super-Heroes and The Heckler for DC Comics, Xena and Return to Jurassic Park for Topps Comics, Star for Image Comics and Dead Kid Adventures, a creator owned project by Knight Press.

## Mitch Byrd

Mitch's pencils wow everyone. While you enjoy his exclusive Sketch material issue after issue, look for his work on Guy Gardner: Warrior, Shi, Starship Troopers, and many other comics, as well as Blue Line Art's Notes to Draw From, Notes to Draw From 2 and Mitch Byrd's Scribbles and Sketches. Mitch's latest projects include a Blood and Roses graphic novel and a creator owned project titled Kings of the Road.



## Bob Almond

A comics fan since the age of nine, Bob instantly set his career goal on breaking into the funny book biz and is probably most-known for his 3-year critically-acclaimed run with Priest & Sal Velluto on Black Panther. His most recent assignment has been a return to his cosmic Marvel roots with the *Annihilation Conquest: Quasar* series. Bob lives in New Bedford, Massachusetts with his wife Diane, his son Nathan and cats Tux and BJ. You can visit his website The Bob Almond Inkwell at <http://www.almondink.com>



## Nate Lovett

Best known as the artist on Xombie: Reanimated from Devil's Due. He has also done colors for Voltron, as well as licensing work for Hasbro, on projects such as GIJoe and the Hulk as well as Cartoon Network. You can check out more of his work at [www.natelovett.com](http://www.natelovett.com).



## Darren Mueller

Darren is a comic book writer and graphic designer, originally from Canada. He moved to Kentucky several years ago to marry his ever supportive wife, and began a small comic book studio. Ringtail Cafe Productions is responsible for a number of comic book series, web comics, comic book websites, and art products.

## Sam Agro

Sam is a writer and illustrator living with his lovely wife and crazy cat in Toronto Canada. Sam creates storyboards for film and television, including several installments of the SAW movie franchise, and also writes and draws comics. Sam is currently writing for the DC titles *Looney Tunes* and *Cartoon Network Block Party*, and is illustrating *Project Epsilon: London Town* at the newly founded *Crystal Fractals Comics* for release in the spring of 2009. Sam also writes and performs comedy with the troupes *The Wrecking Crew* and *The Canadian Space Opera Company (CSpOC)*. Sam believes the ghost of Burt Convy inhabits his microwave.



## George Calloway

I've been drawing since the age of 3. My mom was probably the first artist I looked to for guidance. She used to be a pretty good artist in her own right. Around the age of 9 or 10 I was able to get published not only in the school paper with a comic strip but also in an independant comic anthology called "Kalamazoo Comix". Cul to last year I decided to get back into art. I began with a couple water color paintings but the real turning point was doing some sketch cards for the Blue Line Charity Auction for Cancer. The response was really good. It was right there I decided to try and get back into illustrating. Right now that entails sketch cards and pin ups but I always strive to improve, never content in letting my art stagnate. As long as I work hard I feel the future is completely open to me.

# Sketch

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Bill Nichols

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Comic books are a **fun medium**! Blue Line Arts' goals are aimed toward enhancing this art form - and others - through knowledge and quality art supplies. We try hard to make certain that you, the reader, have the comic book technique information you require for your personal enjoyment of this great field.

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## Bills Words

### The Icestorm Cometh

For over 10 days we were without power and it was two-and-a-half weeks we were without running water, all thanks to an ice storm that ravaged several states throughout the Midwest. Power lines, utility poles and tree limbs all snapped. Some people still don't have power or water as I write this.

It could have been worse, I know. Thanks to the resourcefulness of my wife and my mother-in-law we had food and such. And thanks to the hospitality of my brother-in-law and his wife, we had a warm place to stay.

And now the aftermath...yay.

I'm inking again, you may be glad to know! One of the projects is *Manhunt*, written by **Jeremy Scully** and penciled by **Ryan Paule**. I'll keep you posted on a release date!

**ComicsXP** is a reality now. You should check it out at: [www.comicsxp.com](http://www.comicsxp.com)

I'm also working on *The Savage Family*, an old project of ours that about to be new again. I'll keep you posted on that one as well.

Are you working on stuff? Being an encourager? Making your days count?

Go for it, my friends. Now's the time.

Best,  
Bill



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AH!





# Adam Hughes

## interview

by Bill Nichols

**Sketch:** What have you been working on lately, Adam? And what's coming up for you?

**Adam:** Still toiling on *All-Star Wonder Woman*, my life's work it seems. A couple of covers for DC, some small commercial assignments. An ulcer.

**Sketch:** Is there something in life you would rather be doing other

than comics and creating such gorgeous artwork? Or are you doing it?

**Adam:** "Lottery winner" seems like a job I would be suited for. I try not to be ungrateful for my luck; I have a wonderful job. I have fabulous creative freedom and much that my peers do not. But my dissatisfaction with my own inabilities really makes me

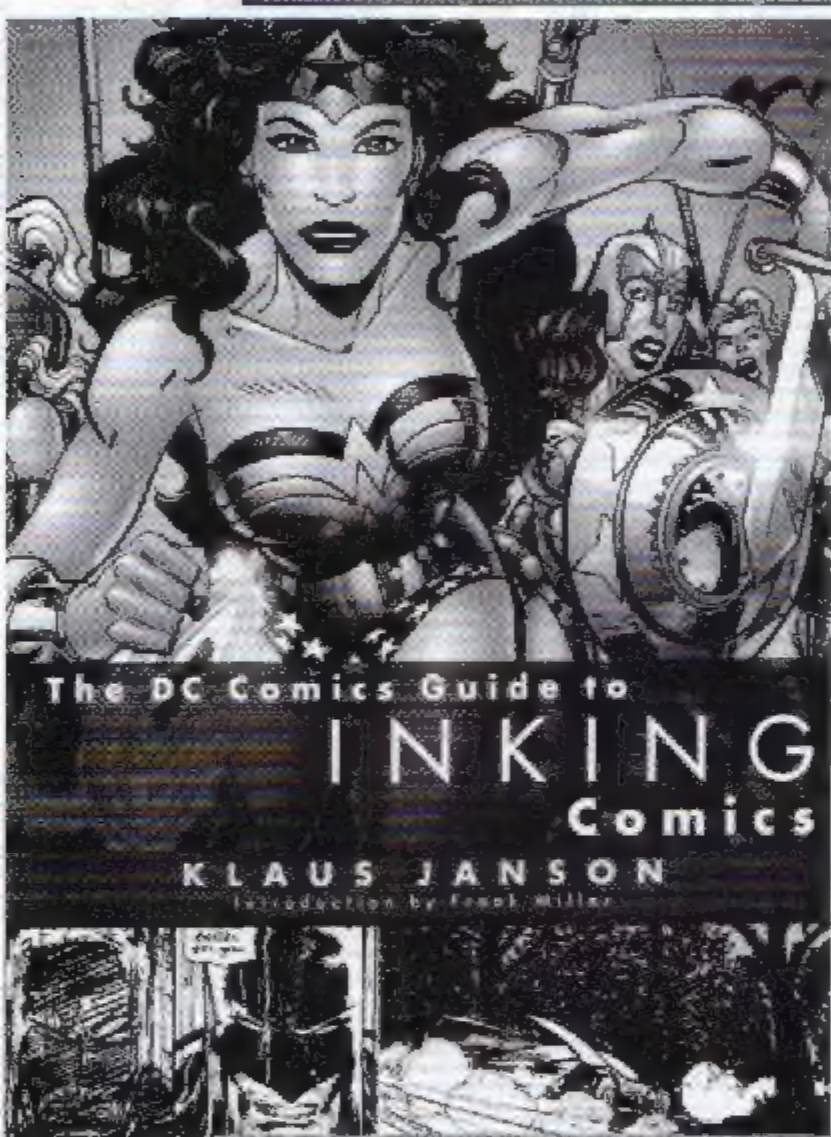
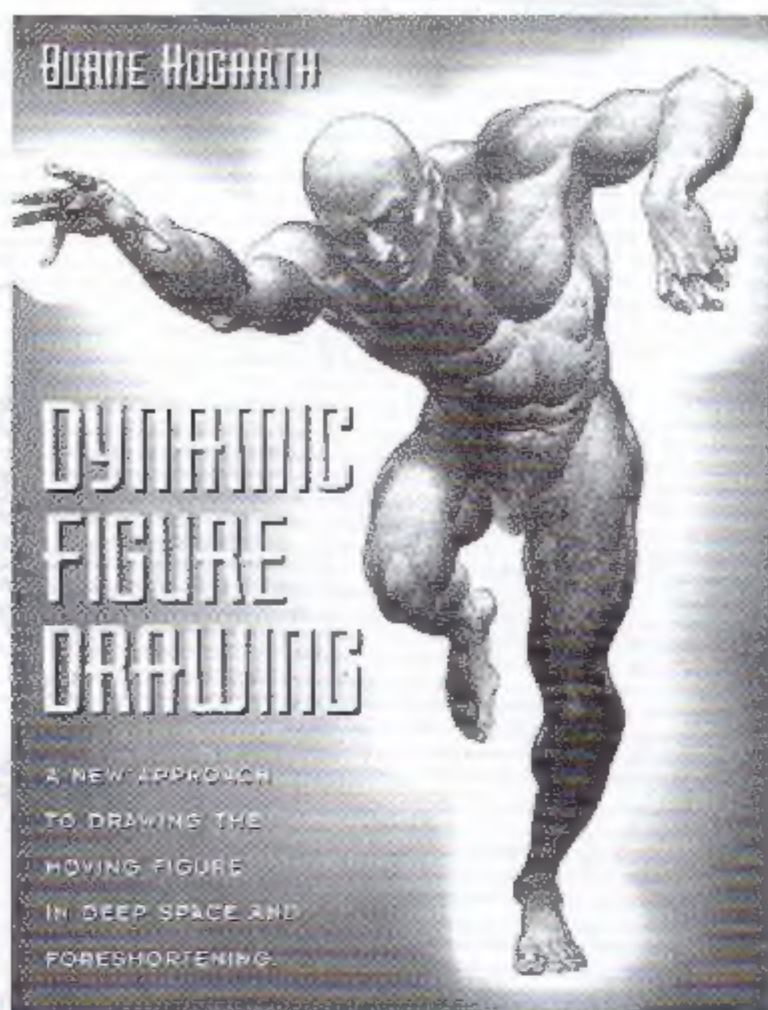
feel like a bush-league Van Gogh most days...all full of angst and ear-hate.

**Sketch:** What are some of your influences, whether it's in style or technique or subject matter?

**Adam:** Well, I thank Dave Stevens for showing me the way that, if you draw girls pretty enough, backgrounds are a luxury



# ARTBOOKS



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Adam Hughes



you can forego. Someday, if I get good, I'll draw dames as well as Dave. I wish I could learn a lesson from all my Mike Mignola comics, that less is almost always more. I'm influenced by Norman Rockwell.... a single cover can tell a whole story if you've got the chops.

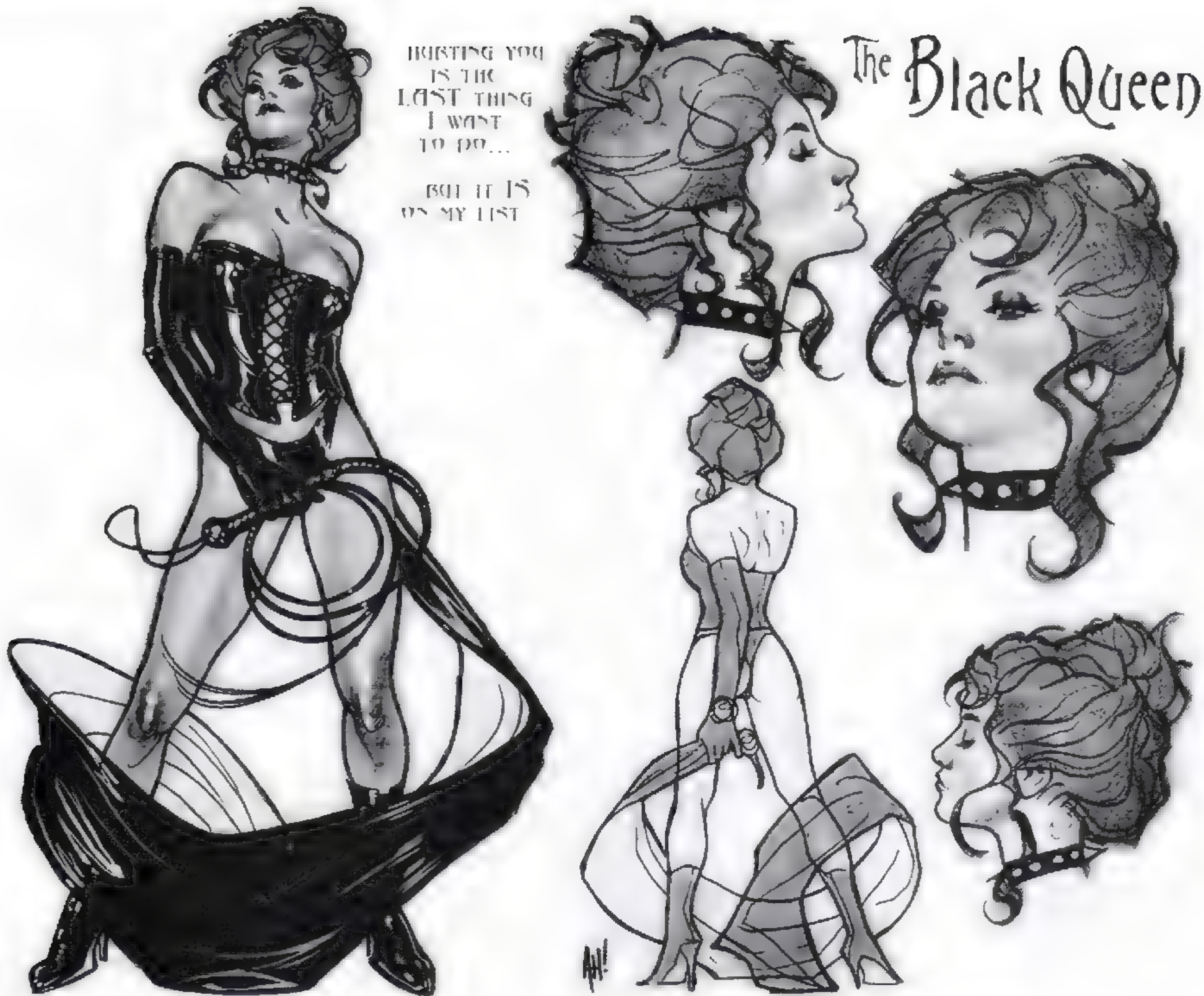
**Sketch:** How did you get to this point in your career, Adam? Natural ability or practice?

**Adam:** Blind dumb luck and virgin sacrifices to volcano gods. I guess I have some natural ability. If, by 'practice', you mean 'intense artistic self-loathing', then.... yes.

**Sketch:** What's the best thing about the comics creating process for you?

**Adam:** Fooling hot chicks into stand around my drawing board all day in bikinis. What a scam, hyuk!





**Sketch:** What sparks your imagination and what inspires you?

**Adam:** Love-letters from the IRS. The pitcher of margaritas I'm using to get this damned interview done. Art is so subjective.

**Sketch:** What else would you like to tackle? Are there any characters or projects that come to mind?

**Adam:** I'd still love to do a WWII Captain America comic. No one draws Cap punching Nazis hard enough. Buncha soft-stooled liberal scum. Wimpy artists, I mean. Not Cap. Or Nazis.

**Sketch:** What's your day like? Is it a tight schedule or something looser?

**Adam:** Schedule? Hi. We haven't met. I'm Adam Hughes.

**Sketch:** Drawing routine or

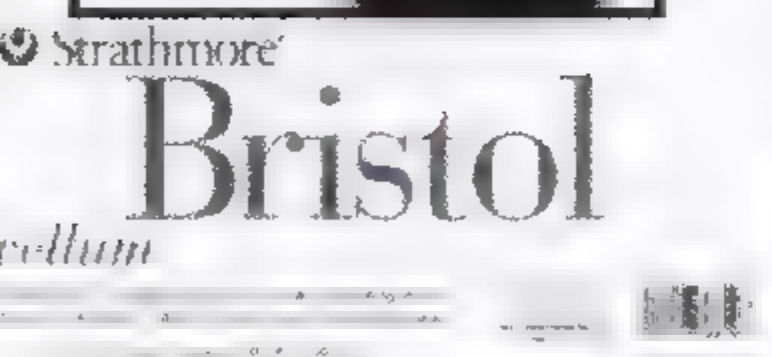
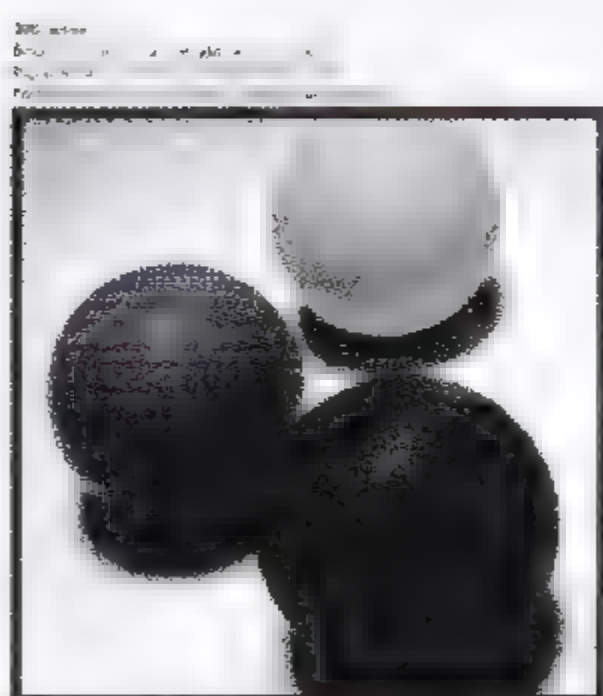
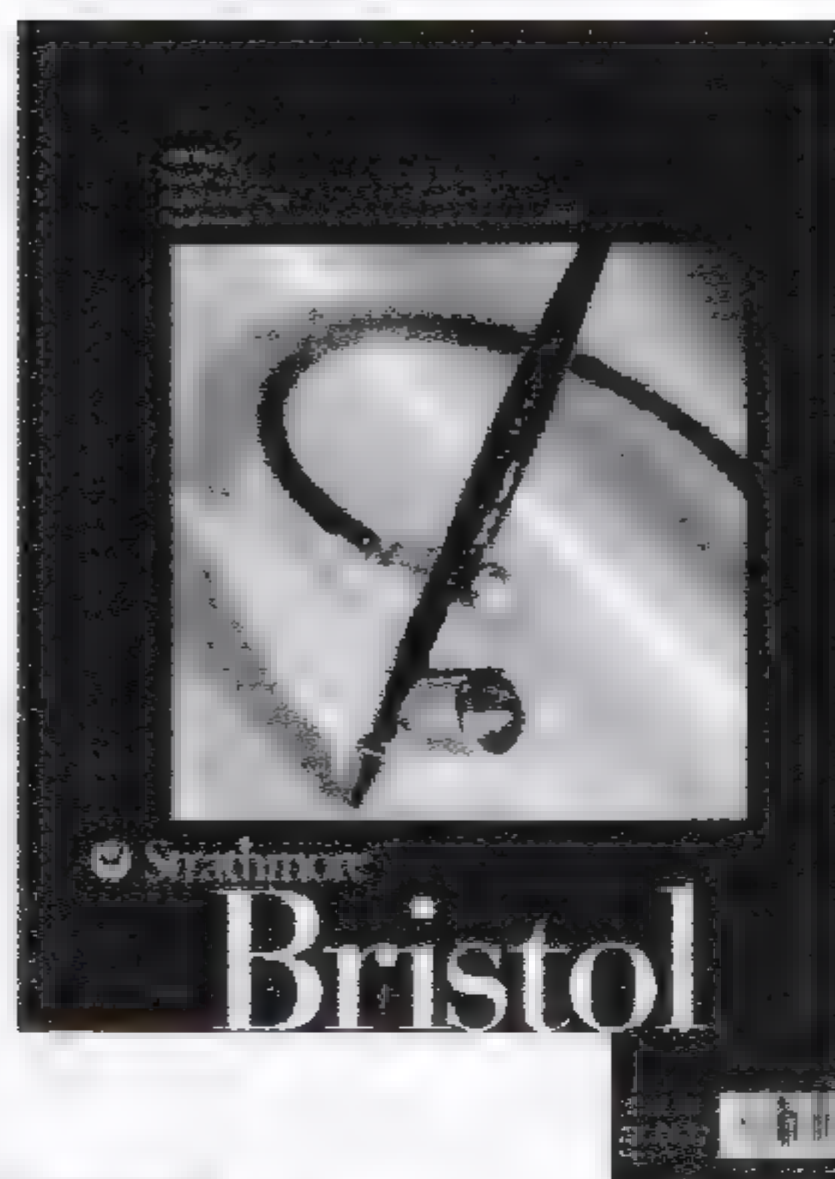
schedule...how many things do you try to finish a day or a week?

**Adam:** \*\*\*fingers in ears\*\*\* La-la-la—! Can't hear you! I self-destruct when I think that way. I just get work done when people yell at me.

**Sketch:** What are some of the tools you use? I know you use Copic markers to great effect. Are there any other particular brands or tools you prefer?



# QUALITY ART PAPERS



Strathmore  
**Tracing**

Adam Hughes

S I X · I M P O S S I B L E



T A I N G

**Adam:** I only use Copic markers for convention sketches, and impressing chicks & dumb natives. "Release my friends and I will bring back the sun!" I started using markers when lighters stopped impressing them.

I like Strathmore series 500 boards, 3-ply. I mix my own ink,

from several different brands. I like French watercolor brushes mit German names; ja, ja - is good und yummy.

**Sketch:** How do you mix your ink?

**Adam:** In a bottle cap, or a Sake cup (which is always full of dried

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ink, it seems). Right now, I like to mix equal parts Dr. PH Martin's Matte Black India Ink and High-Carbon India Ink, with 3 drops of technical pen ink. The tech pen ink has some flow-improving polymer in it that keeps it from clogging in the pen; mixing it with the ink helps the brush stay wet and the ink to flow nicely. Avoid the tech pen ink if you're trying for the dry-brush effects

**Sketch:** How do you approach a page or a whole story? Do you

think the pictures through to the end and how much does the process change for you?

**Adam:** I approach each job with a grand idea. Every step of the way I am frustrated by my inability to convey the Sistine Chapel I see in my head. In the end, my one true skill is the ability to

white-out myself from the corners I've been painted into. That's no joke. I think my skill is the ability to make lemonade out of the lemons I come up with. People think "Wow! How did you come up with the idea for quiche!" and I go "I was actually trying to discover a cure for cancer..."





**Sketch:** Do you do thumbnails? How many sketches will you do for something before you settle on something that works?

**Adam:** I do thumbnails, and if there's time I will do sketches to eat up the whole time I have to do the assignment. Sometimes I have to go straight to the board, because of time, and then it's just a matter of doing a glorified convention sketch and tarding it up to look like real work.

**Sketch:** How do you feel about art school and formal training?

**Adam:** Ha! CHIMPS. College is for stupid people. Actually I'm just bitter because I never went.

**Sketch:** Was doing the work you do ever how you thought your life's plan would work out?

**Adam:** Yes and no. I thought I'd end up in comics art if I was lucky. I didn't think I would end up with the career that I have, the notoriety (both good and bad) that I possess, or that my work would take me around the world.

**Sketch:** Do you have favorites that you follow, whether it's a creator or a title?

**Adam:** Hmmmm. Anytime **Mike Mignola** does anything. Same for **Craig Russell**. I love *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. I just got into *Fables*. I'm forgetting lots. What's in this margarita..? Jeez.

**Sketch:** What tips would you pass along to the AH!-philes out there? What's a technique you use..?

**Adam:** Well, I'd say ink with a brush. Mastering the brush is really the royal road to success.

**Sketch:** What kind of brushes do you prefer?

**Adam:** Scharff watercolor brushes, #s 3 & 4, are great





for the type of inking I like to do. I heard that Joe Kubert inks with #9, and that Dave Stevens would do detail work with a 000. That's too hardcore for me, in either direction of the spectrum!

**Sketch:** Full-script or a plot. How do you like to work?

**Adam:** Full-script.

**Sketch:** How do you feel about inking?

**Adam:** I hate it, because I never got good at it. It's such an art form.

**Sketch:** Inkers...who inks you well? Who would you like to see ink your pencils?

**Adam:** Karl Story, Mark Farmer, Kevin Nowlan all ink me wonderfully. Being inked by Dave Stevens was a dream come true for me. I'm not sure who I'd like to see ink me... I'm not one of those artists whose structure is the reason why the art is good to look at... Jack Kirby, John Buscema, Gil Kane.... those guys' foundations were so solid, ANYONE could ink them and it was the comic equivalent of a jazz band improv. I think I cover up all my weaknesses with rendering tricks, so, I fear I should man the ink at all times, so that none of my flaws gets through the fences....

**Sketch:** Do you have mentors in the business?

**Adam:** Chimps! All of them. I mean, 'yes'.

**Sketch:** Mentors, or chimps, in what way?

**Adam:** Guys who answer apprentice-level questions.... whether it's in person or through the work of a long-gone master. There's nothing better than a dead-mentor; you don't have to make coffee.

**Sketch:** Influences...anyone else? Writers or artists?

**Adam:** I don't think I read enough to have writers as influences... All sorts of artists influence. I get jazzed by Drew Struzan, Norman Rockwell, or Alphonse Mucha. Comics guys like Mike Mignola,





**Craig Russell, Kevin Nowlan** all make me want to get some art out. **Travis Charest** makes me feel like I'm never giving my art my best efforts.

**Sketch:** How do you feel about being an influence yourself?

**Adam:** I weep, WEEP for the future, if I am any sort of influence. My vocational guidance counselor asked me what career I would be best suited for, and I think I responded with 'Cautionary tale'. My mother thought I would always excel as a bad example.

**Sketch:** What's the easiest part of all this?

**Adam:** What, interviews? The drinking. If I did weed, it'd be like driving an Amtrak train.

**Sketch:** The hardest?

**Adam:** Damn! I missed an eBay auction I was trying to win because of this damned interview! Crap! Crap on a crap cracker!

**Sketch:** What else would you like to be working on?

**Adam:** Building the perfect work environment is a project I'd like to explore; after all this time, I think I'd like a good studio. I sometimes wonder where I should I focus my time - single illustration or sequential work? Should I self-market? It's baffling. I just want a grown-up to come along and make it all right.

**Sketch:** Who would you like to collaborate with sometime?





**Adam:** It's probably best that I don't. I don't think I play well with others any more. It's the reason I should probably steer clear of working in Hollywood.

**Sketch:** I know you're inundated with commission requests. Anything you want to say about that?

**Adam:** I wish, WISH I could draw everyone's commissions. I hate letting all the little broomstick cowboys down, out there. Hang in there, Buckaroos.

**Sketch:** How full is your "plate", projects-wise?

**Adam:** Overflowing.

**Sketch:** What is something you'd like to share about yourself with the readers of *Sketch Magazine*?

**Adam:** I really don't drink this much. It's just lough. We're trying to buy a house, and it's really such a pain in the current financial climate. I'm more wasted than Peter O'toole on his birthday, but it's just 'coz of the house. Don't drink, kids.

Sketch





A big ego wants to pick lots of fights with your collaborators and bosses, but choose your fights carefully. Every conflict can hurt your career, and — like Dead Kid taking on this locomotive — it's a big mistake to put yourself on a collision course with an unbeatable adversary.

## The Universe at Your Finger Tips

### Thoughts on Scripting Comic Books

# KEEPIN YOUR EGO IN CHECK

by Tom Bierbaum

It's almost impossible to succeed in a creative business without a little ego to spur you on and keep you convinced your work is worthwhile. But a little ego goes a long way and a lot of ego can ruin a career.

Okay it's true, we see many famous creators who have huge egos to match their huge accomplishments, but I think it's a mistake to assume they're successful *because* of their egos. My observation is they're successful in spite of it — they're so talented that people are forced to put up with the ego to get the results of all that talent. And when you *are* that good, it takes exceptional strength of character to keep your ego in check when you're



constantly hearing people tell you how great you are. A few people have both enormous talent *and* that kind of enormous strength of character, but when such a combination occurs, it's a happy coincidence and a pretty rare one.

Now, if you question the importance or relevance of this topic, I've got to say I think this was one of the most challenging issues I've had to deal with and could have handled better in my earlier years. Virtually every conflict I had with a collaborator or boss could have been avoided and I'd have been better off because of it.

And this is something that affects all writers right from the beginning – from the first time you show someone one of your little home-made comics, to the first time you try to put together a project with some willing amateur artist, to when you're the biggest success in the business, ego is always an issue – and a potential pitfall – in any creative endeavor.

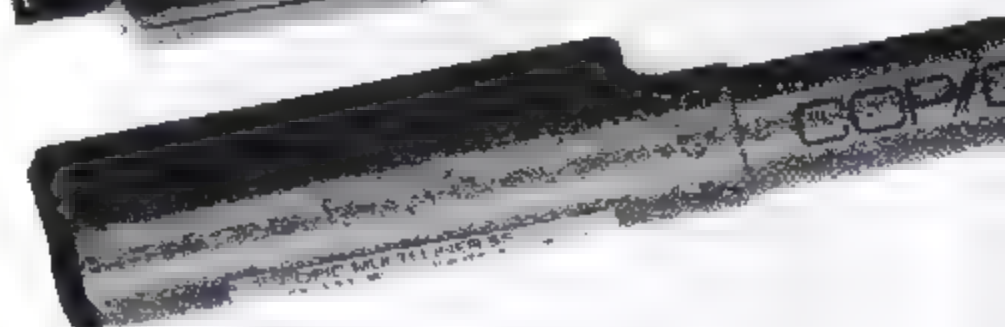
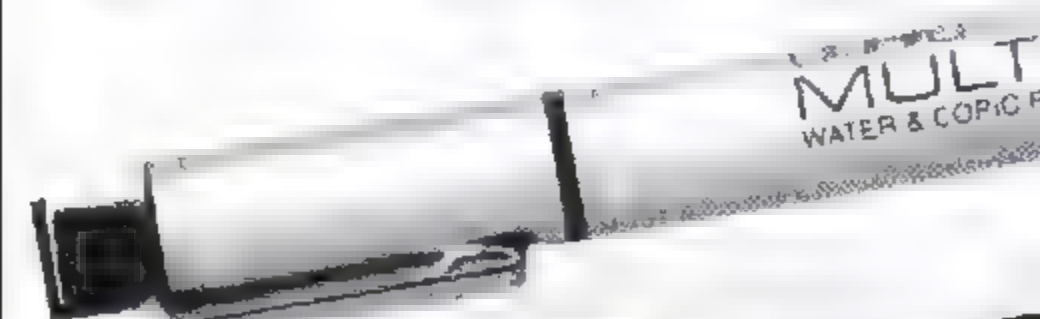
As mentioned initially, a little ego is probably necessary, and there are a few ways that an appropriate dose of self-esteem is truly helpful:

- \* It gives you confidence, assertiveness and the ability to sell yourself.
- \* It gives you the strength and security to keep cool when you're being criticized and potentially use that criticism to improve your work if it happens to have some validity.
- \* It convinces you that the kind of offbeat, random, esoteric and downright weird things that pop out of your imagination just might be worth pursuing creatively.
- \* It allows you to shrewdly sort through that weirdness and not be threatened by the fact that most of it is useless, so you can move on and identify those very rare bits of weirdness that might actually be inspired and useful.

But if that kind of healthy self-esteem grows into an over-sized ego, what once was a big benefit can become a major hindrance in many ways, including the following:

- \* You're not good at taking criticism.
- \* You stubbornly cling to your creative choices, whether they're good ones or not.
- \* You trample on your the feelings of your creative team and have trouble truly collaborating because your choices are right and their choices are wrong. Pretty soon collaborators stop wanting to work with you.
- \* You get yourself in trouble with your bosses because you know you're right and they're wrong. Pretty soon editors stop wanting to work with you.
- \* The fans pick up on your egotistical behavior and start to dislike you. Suddenly stories they used to read with an open mind no longer get the benefit of the doubt. Pretty soon nobody wants to read your comics.

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There are lots more consequences to an out-of-control ego, but you get the idea. The point of this column is to talk about specific things you can do to keep your ego in check and maintain instead a healthy sense of self-esteem. Here are a few suggestions:

### 1. Remember Your Missteps.

A good creator tends to develop amnesia about his or her past mistakes. To be good at what you do, it's helpful to understand your mistakes, learn from them and then forget them, so you move forward with confidence and assertiveness. But keep those mistakes in some compartment in your mind, so when feelings of infallibility start to get you into trouble, you can pull out some of those old mistakes from their secret compartment and remind yourself that you're as fallible as the next guy.

### 2. Choose Your Fights Carefully.

Every fight you have with an editor or collaborator can have serious ramifications to your career, so keep them to a minimum. Don't go to the mat over something that doesn't really matter. Save it for a dispute that's of major importance and really worth the conflict — for when you know you have an airtight case and that over time you'll be proven right.

And obviously, there's no point in fighting tooth and nail against someone who's got a lot more clout than you do. You'll lose every time and it can do huge damage to your future prospects. It may not be fair and you really may be the one who's right, but the only smart thing to do is to just let it slide and wait patiently for the day when you've earned that kind of clout yourself.

### 3. Measure Yourself by Objective Standards.

When you've got a big ego, everything you do is good and that's the most important standard in your mind. But trust that measurable, quantifiable standards like sales figures and reader polls set a more realistic standard than your own preferences and opinions. When you convince yourself you're the best creator ever, think about all the other creators who are far ahead of you by those more objective, more measurable standards, and remember that you've got a long way to go.

### 4. Remember What the Ultimate Goal Is.

To justify themselves, comics have to sell enough copies to cover their costs, so don't dismiss objective measures like sales figures as a "sell-out" or "too commercial" to be worthy of your attention. When your ego pushes you into a creative dispute, focus on whether your way is going to help or hinder the

comic's ability to meet those objective standards. It doesn't do your team any good if you win a creative argument that in your mind enhances the quality of the project if it ends up hurting its sales performance and maybe hurting the comic's chances of survival.

### 5. Remember Whose Neck is on the Line.

Usually it's the editor who feels the regular, direct pressure from his or her bosses to make sure a comic comes out right and sells a lot of issues or else. If the editors are going to take the heat, then they have to be the ones to ultimately decide what gets published. Editors should not have to go into their meetings defending creative decisions they strongly oppose.

Your career options may require that you, too, absolutely must succeed with a particular assignment, so if your neck is really on the line as much as the editor's, that's a reason to fight a lot harder than you might have otherwise, but again, make sure you're fighting for something that contributes to real, measurable success, not your general idea of quality.

### 6. It's Not Personal

Separate your self from your work. A criticism of your story isn't a criticism of you. People need to have the freedom to criticize your work — to hate it if that's their honest evaluation — without feeling like they're attacking you as a person.

Over time, you'll find that your attachment to your work fades. A story you'll fight to the death to defend today may in five years become a story that you yourself no longer like. And the quicker you can let go of that need to fiercely defend every creative decision you ever make, the quicker you can develop the kind of flexible, innovative imagination that isn't limited by a narrow perspective and rigid, dogmatic thinking.

### 7. Realize That Mistakes Are Good.

It's trite but true, we learn from our mistakes. But there's something more profound about mistakes than just their ability to teach us what to avoid. So many of the great discoveries over time (creative, scientific and otherwise) have occurred because somebody made a mistake and the unintended new version they accidentally created worked out better than the intended older version.





It's beyond pointless to try and prove you're never wrong about anything. Not only does everyone inevitably make mistakes, but the creators who don't mind making mistakes and, in fact, embrace those mistakes, turn out to be the best creators. They learn and improve because of those mistakes and they achieve great creative leaps because they understand the possible innovation that a mistake can produce.

### 8. Laugh at Yourself.

Make self-deprecating humor a key facet of your industry persona. Find creative, entertaining ways to make it clear you don't take yourself too seriously. This will help train you to take blows to the ego in stride and have the best chance of turning them into positives. And people generally find this sort of thing appealing. It make them *want* to like your work.

### 9. Everybody's Entitled to Their Opinion

Become a tireless advocate of every fan's right to decide what's good and bad for himself. The comics industry has really suffered because of group thinking – pressure by various groups to make communal decisions about what's good and bad so they can try and wipe out what is collectively deemed to be bad.

Every paying customer is entitled to his or her one vote, no more no less. When somebody says they dislike your work, they're exercising that vitally important right and you should encourage them to do so. If enough individuals express the same viewpoint, you can benefit by listening and changing your work accordingly and you'll probably be better off for it.

But listening and respecting the viewpoints of all your readers doesn't mean you have to change anything if that's not what your creative judgment

dictates (A lot of times readers think they want something, but really enjoy the comic more when they're getting something else), it just means you'll be well informed about the wide range of viewpoints that are out there among the readers.

### 10. There's No Right Way or Wrong Way.

It's so easy to get into an intractable fight with an editor or collaborator because you know with certainty that you're right and they're wrong. But it's an illusion. For virtually any creative choice, there's some positive and some negative result. If your hero intentionally kills the villain, some readers will cheer and some will howl. If your hero spares the villain, a different group of readers will cheer and a different group will howl. Whatever choice the team ultimately makes isn't a right one or wrong one, it's just a matter of accepting one set of positives and one set of negatives.

And whoever gets his or her way, they're the ones who'll be on the hot seat if the negatives eventually seem to outweigh the positives. So why fight tooth and nail to make sure you're the one on that hot seat? No matter how right you think you are, the negatives of your approach may end up being a big deal to someone when it's time to point the finger of blame. You'll be on the spot and you fought tooth and nail to put yourself there.

So there's no need to wage a jihad. A reasonable choice that's reached cooperatively and amicably is far less likely to get you into trouble than a dictatorial choice that you've angrily imposed on everyone else.

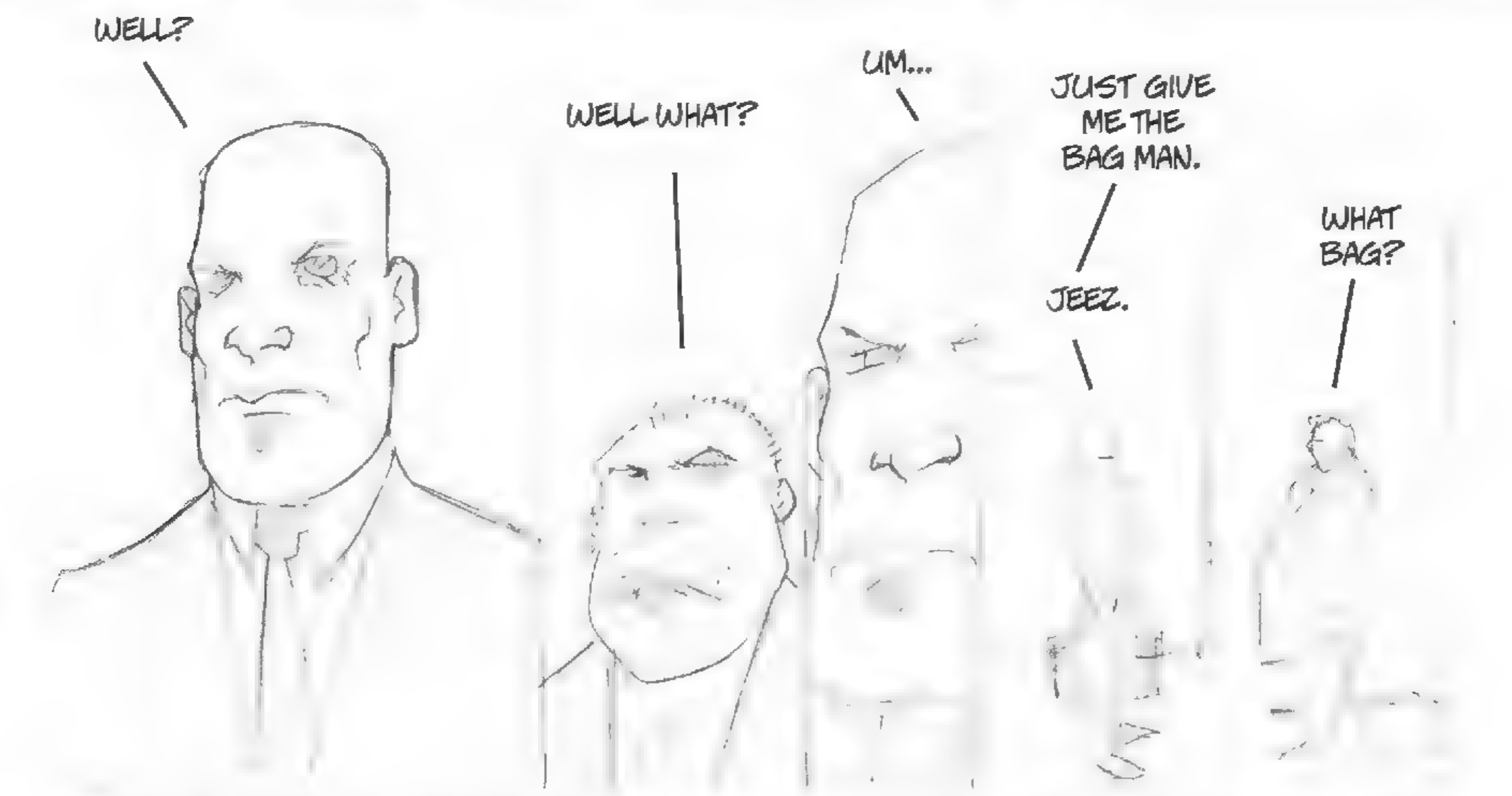
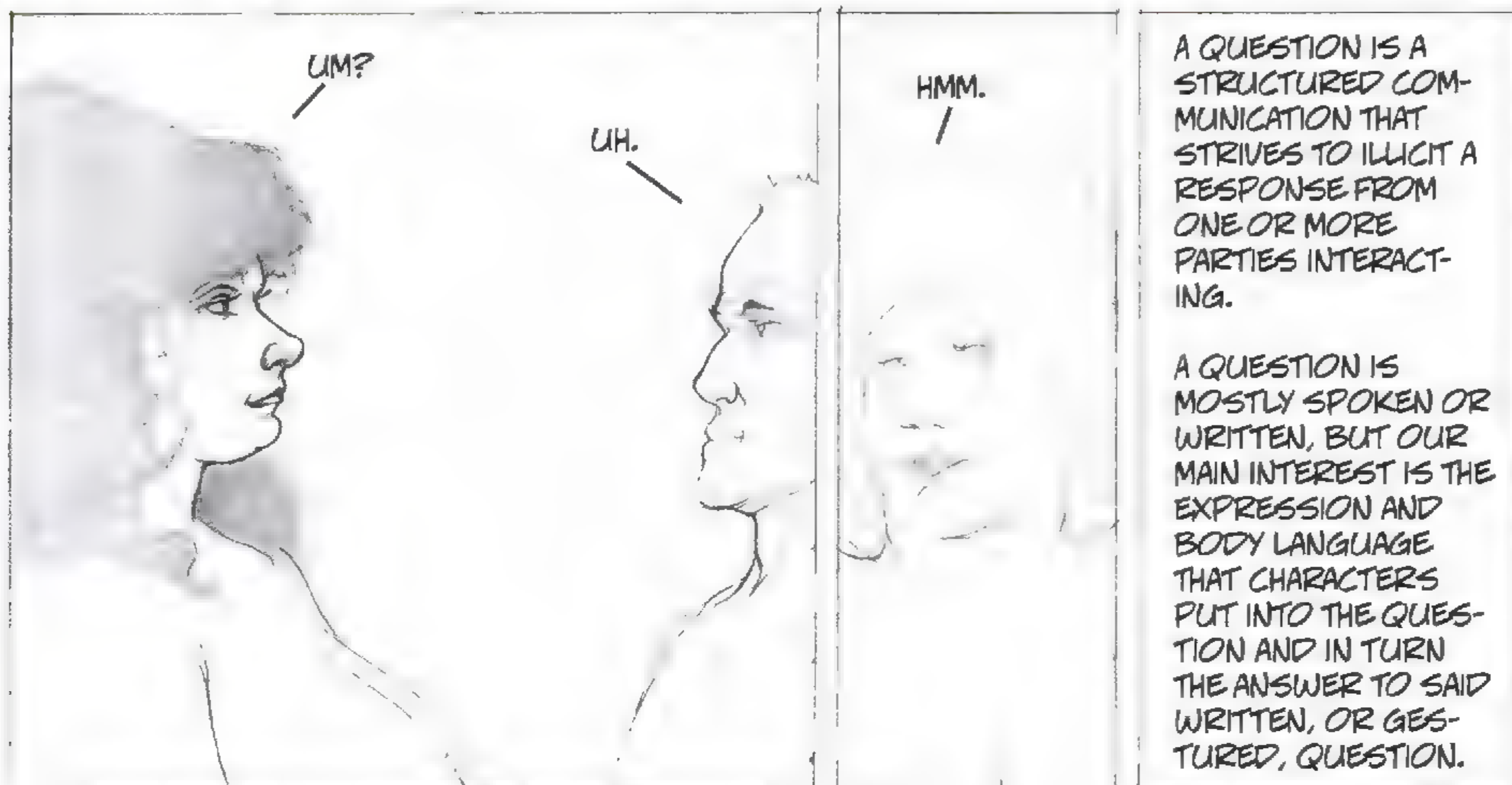
It's one of many examples of how keeping your ego in check can keep things moving along smoothly, while giving in to your ego can make things a lot more complicated than they need to be. And in this era with the many challenges you face trying to make it in the comics business, the fewer complications, the better.



Notes to Draw From

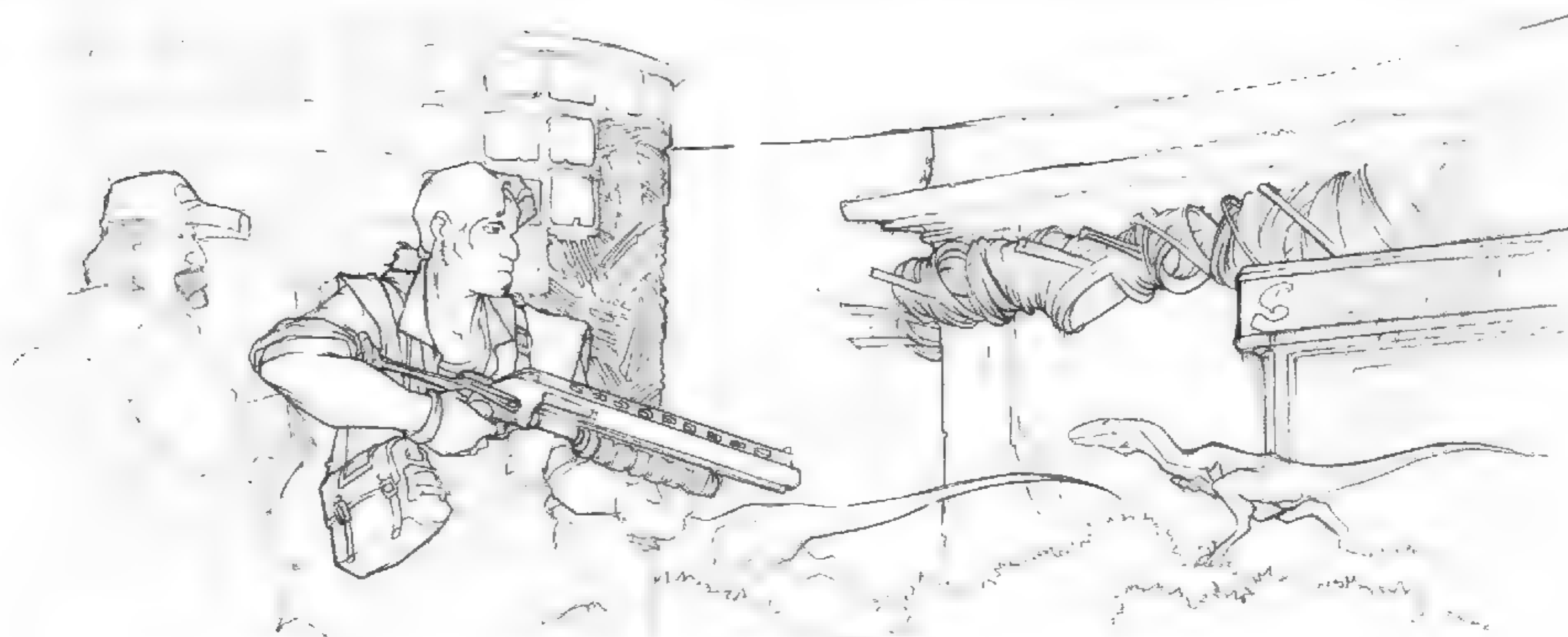
# Questions & Answers

by Mitch Byrd



NOW GRANTED, THERE WILL CERTAINLY BE OCCASIONS IN STORYLINES WHEN CHARACTERS WILL SPEAK TO EACH OTHER IN STONE-FACE FASHION LIKE MANNEQUINS SELLING BAD SUITS. IMAGINE A COUPLE OF GANGSTERS SIZING EACH OTHER UP, NEITHER WANTING TO TIP HIS HAND AND SHOW WEAKNESS WITH EXPRESSION, REGARDLESS OF HOW TUFF THE TALK GETS.





AND KEEP IN MIND THAT THE "Q & A" THAT GOES ON BETWEEN TWO CHARACTERS WILL OFTEN REFER TO VISUAL CUES THAT YOU WILL HAVE TO PROVIDE IN THE STORY, SUCH AS THE DINOSAURS THE HUNTERS ARE WATCHING.

YOU WANT  
TO GO  
FOR THEM?



THAT'S  
DEPENDS.

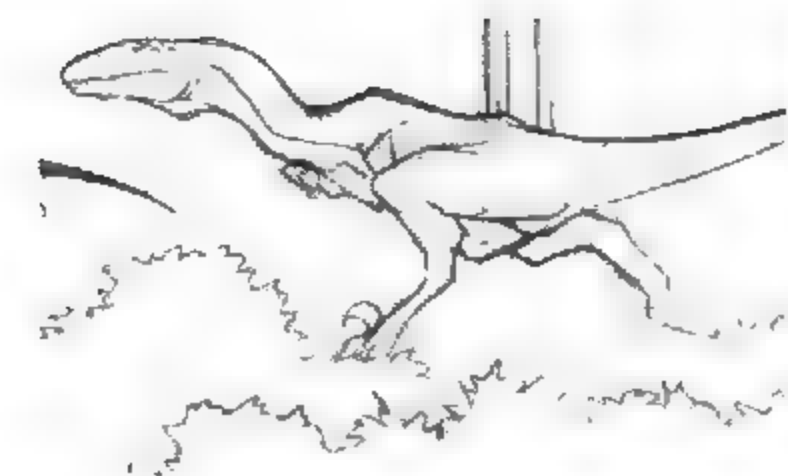


ON WHAT?

I



IF I CAN GO FOR THEM  
IN THE OPPOSITE  
DIRECTION.





AGAIN! WHY DID I LET YOU  
GET THAT DOG!?

NOW THERE'S A  
STUPID QUESTION.



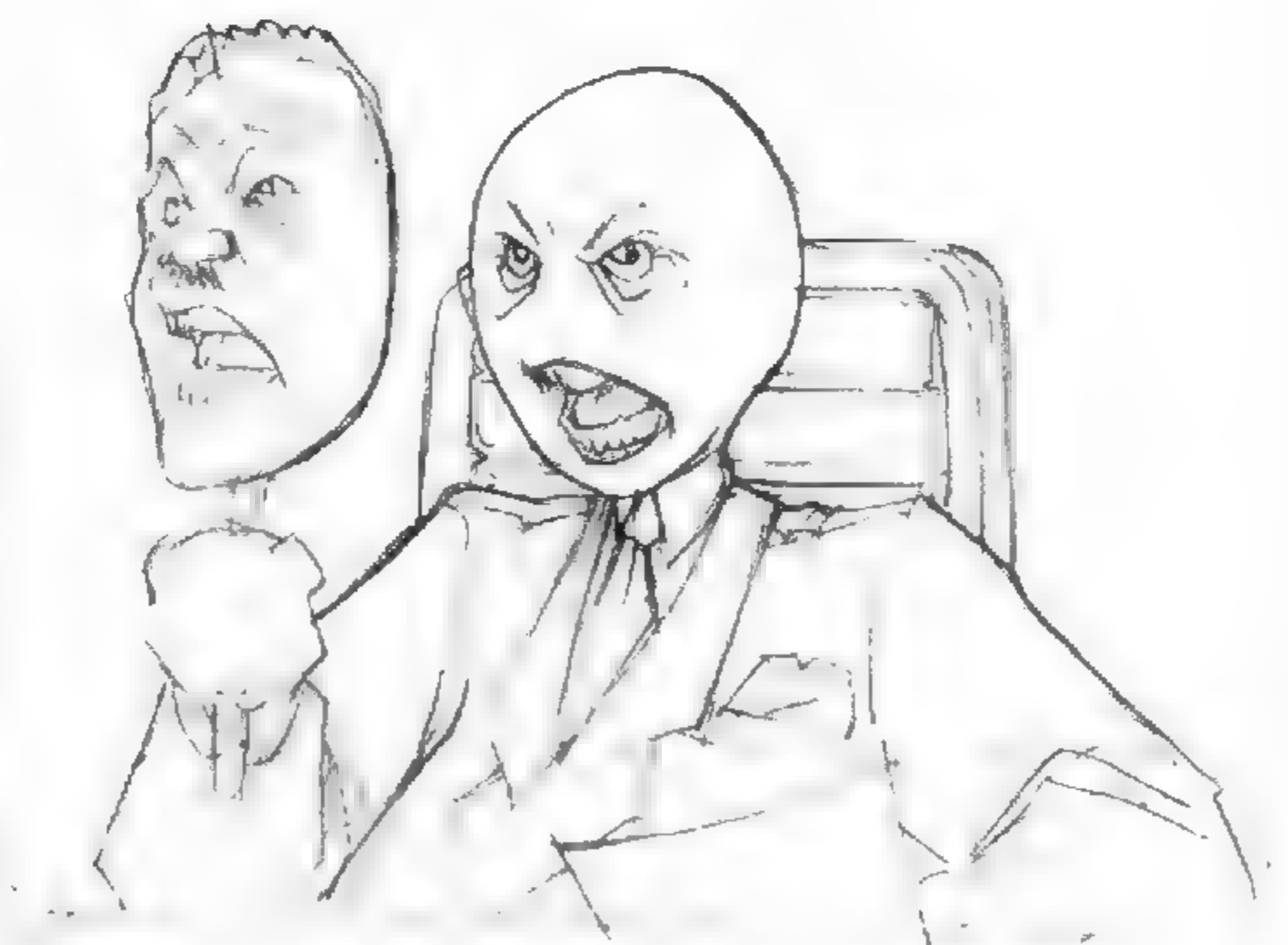
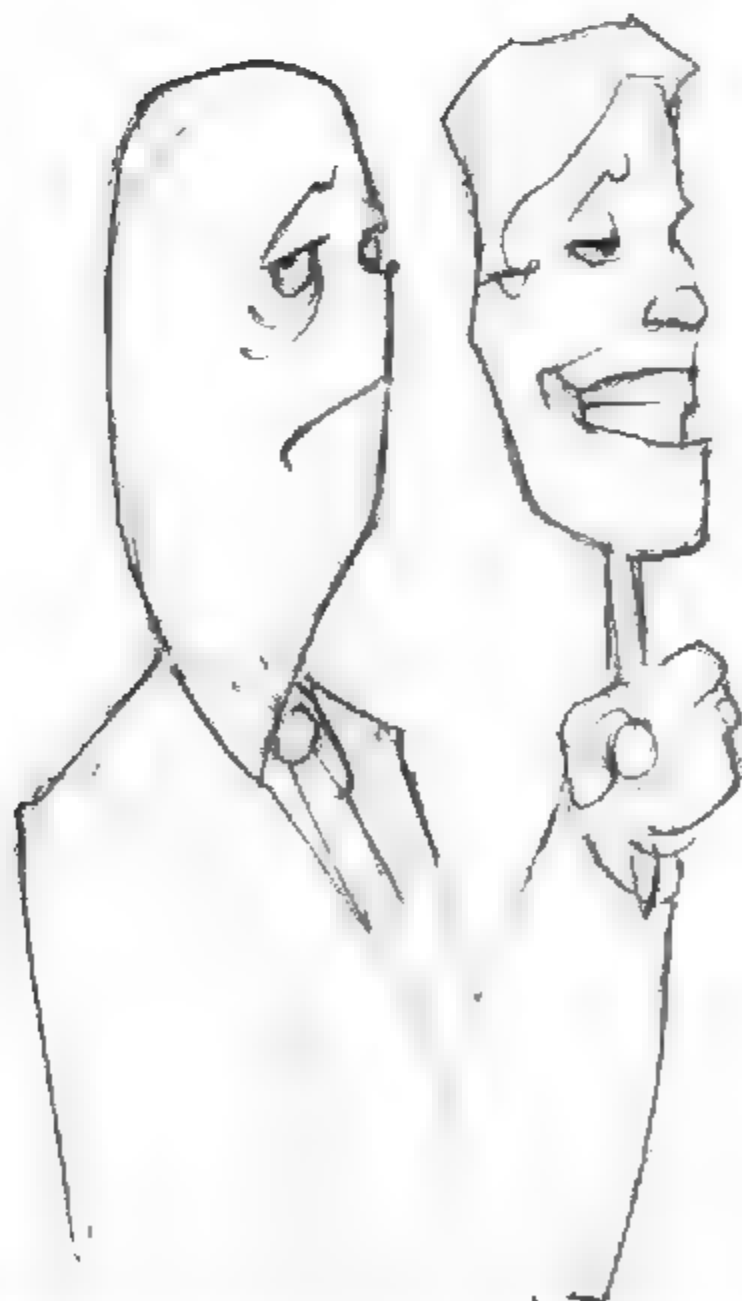
BODY LANGUAGE IS THE  
UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE THAT  
TRANSCENDS THE SPOKEN  
WORD.

THE MAN'S BODY LANGUAGE  
ECHOES HIS WORDS WHILE  
THE WOMAN'S BODY LAN-  
GUAGE CAN BE SAYING A  
LOT OF THINGS, SUCH AS  
SHE'S THE KIND OF GIRL  
WHO'S USED TO GETTING  
WHAT SHE WANTS" MONEY,  
JEWELS, CARS,... SCALPS.

SURE THING BOSS, I'LL MAKE  
SURE THE PACKAGE GET'S THERE  
ON TIME. JUST LIKE ALWAYS,  
RIGHT?

NO!

I MEAN IT THIS  
TIME!



ANOTHER THING TO CONSIDER IN THE STORY IS THAT SOMETIMES THE CHARACTERS WILL BE "ACTING  
OUT" THEIR DIALOGUE WHILE FEELING OR THINKING THINGS CONTRARY TO WHAT WILL BE PRE-  
SENTED VISUALLY.





AND THERE ARE ALWAYS THOSE FELLOWS WHO ASK AND ANSWER THEIR OWN QUESTIONS.

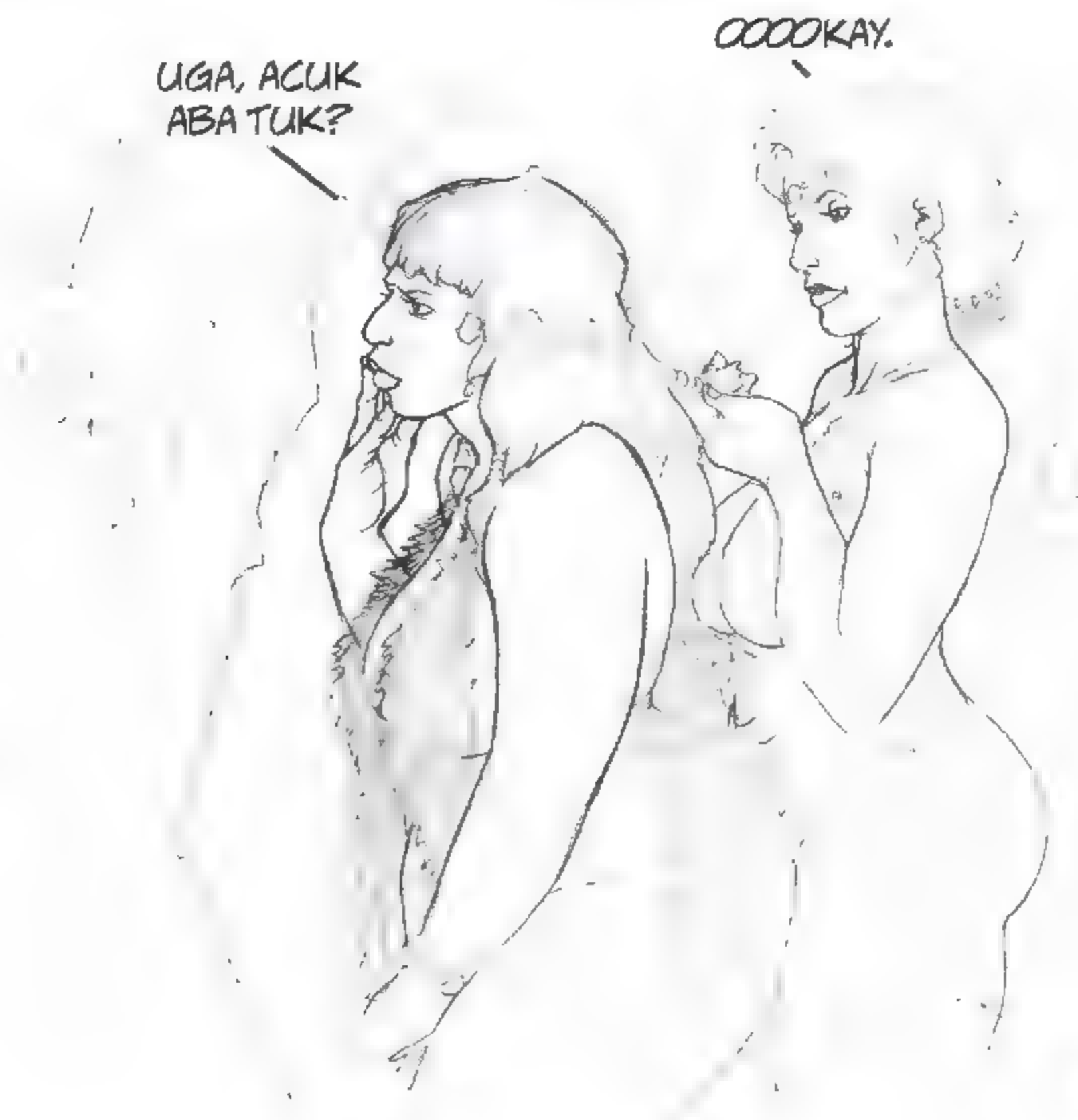


AND TAKE NOTE OF A USEFUL STORYTELLING DEVICE: CHARACTERS CAN INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER BY SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO THE READER. THIS ALSO HELPS TO INVOLVE THE READER IN THE STORY.





OF COURSE, NOT ALL QUESTIONS ARE ANSWERED.



NOT ANSWERED FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS. JUST REMEMBER THAT CHARACTERS ARE DEPENDING ON YOU TO HELP GET THEIR POINTS ACROSS.



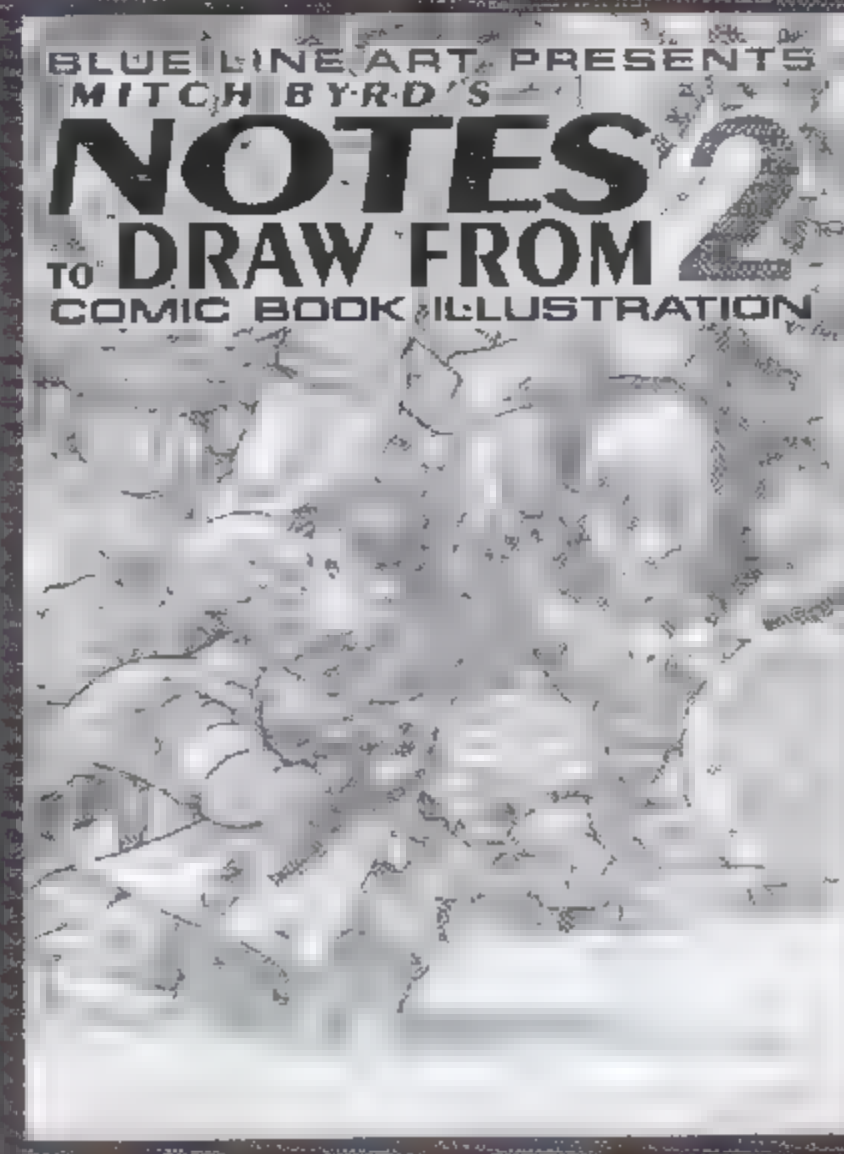
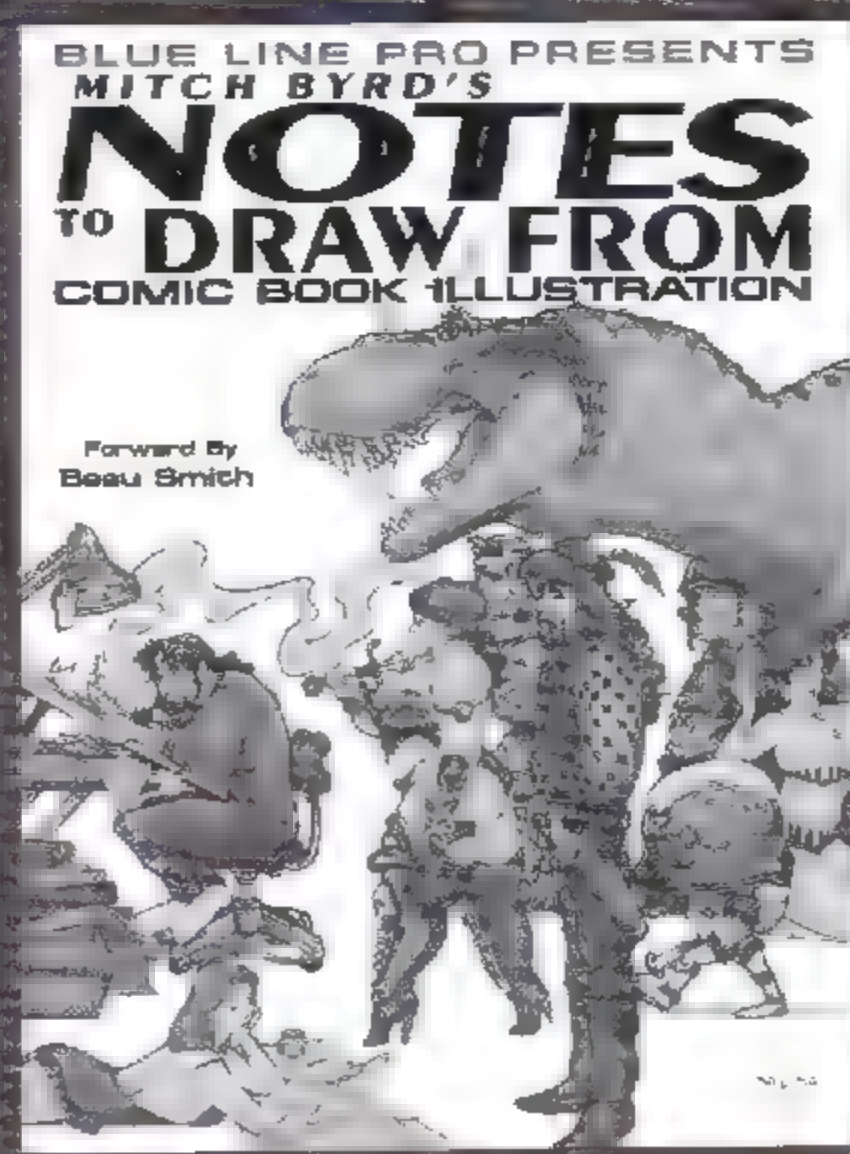
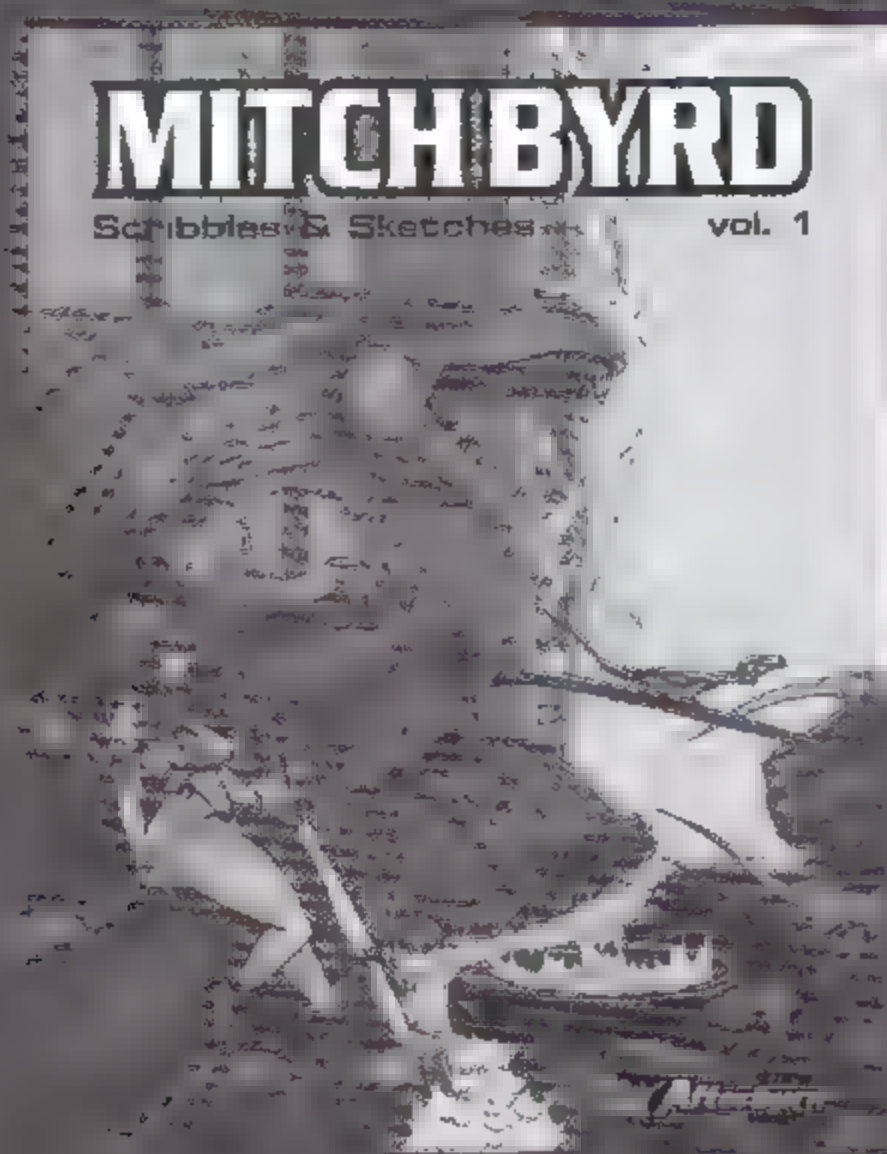
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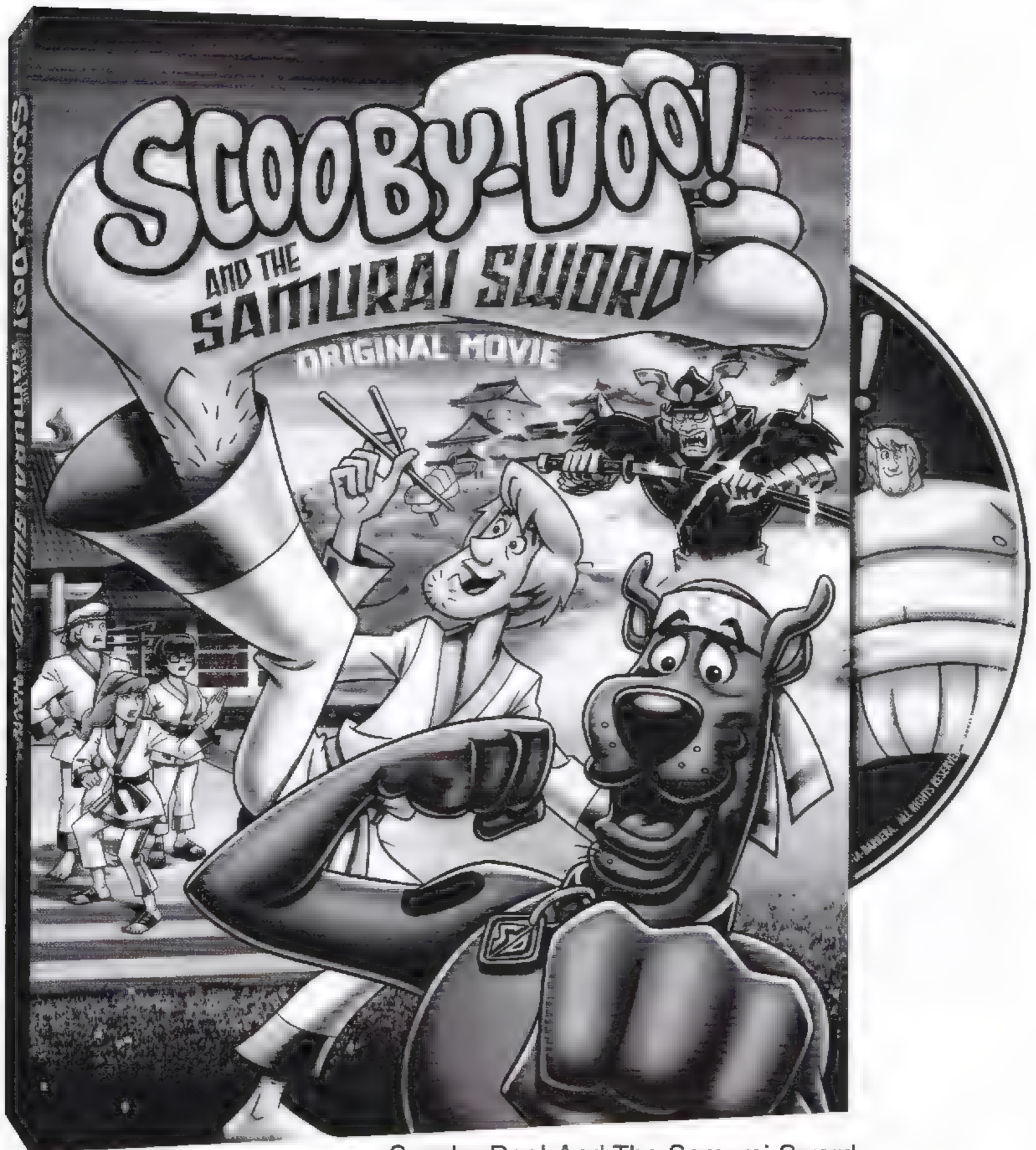
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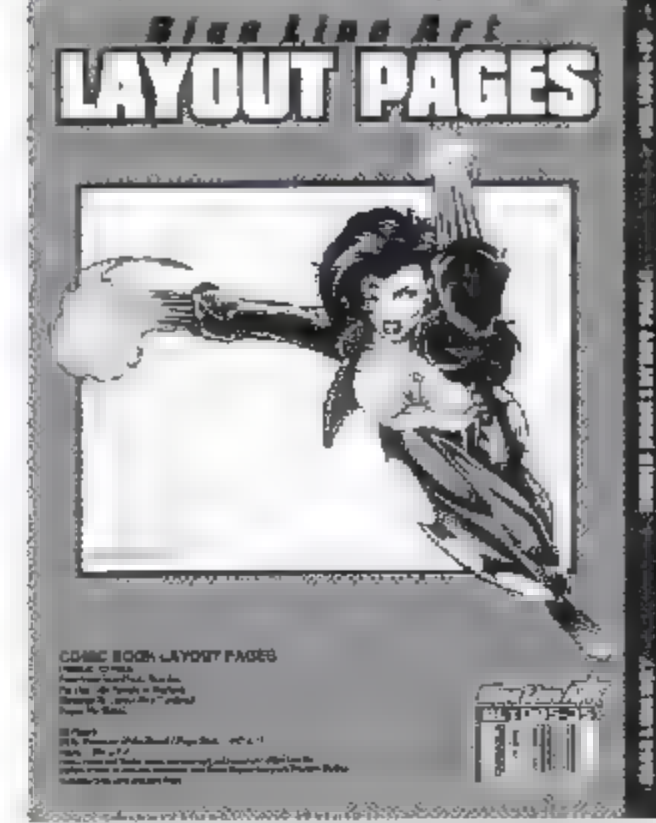
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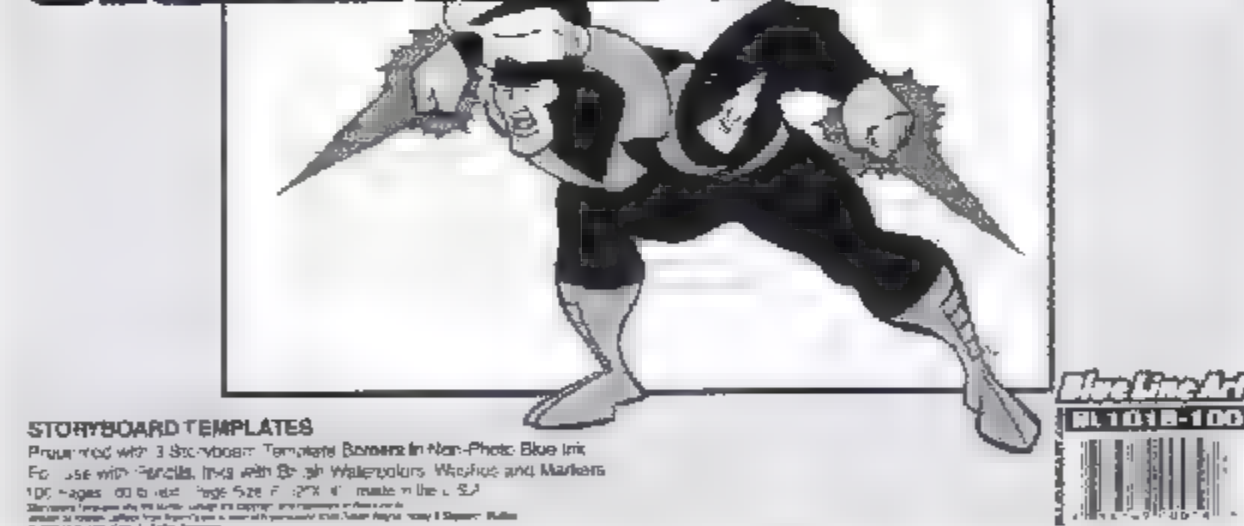
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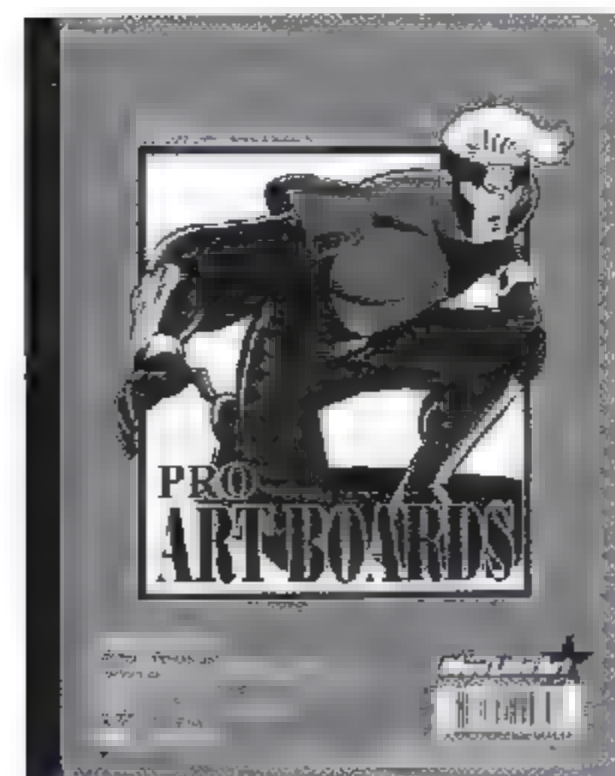
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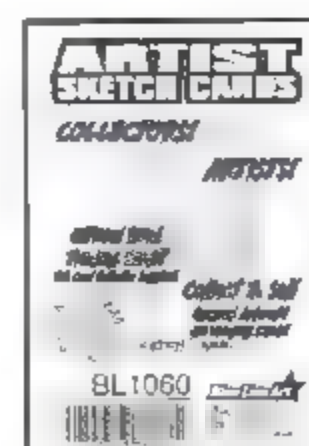
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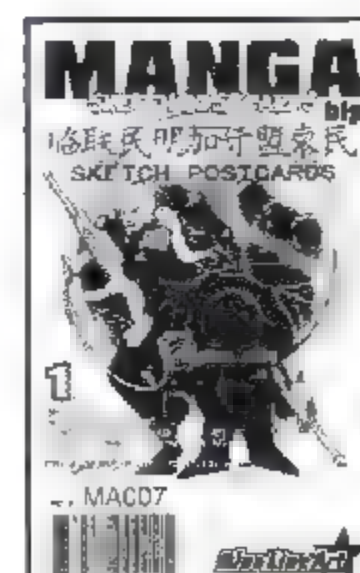
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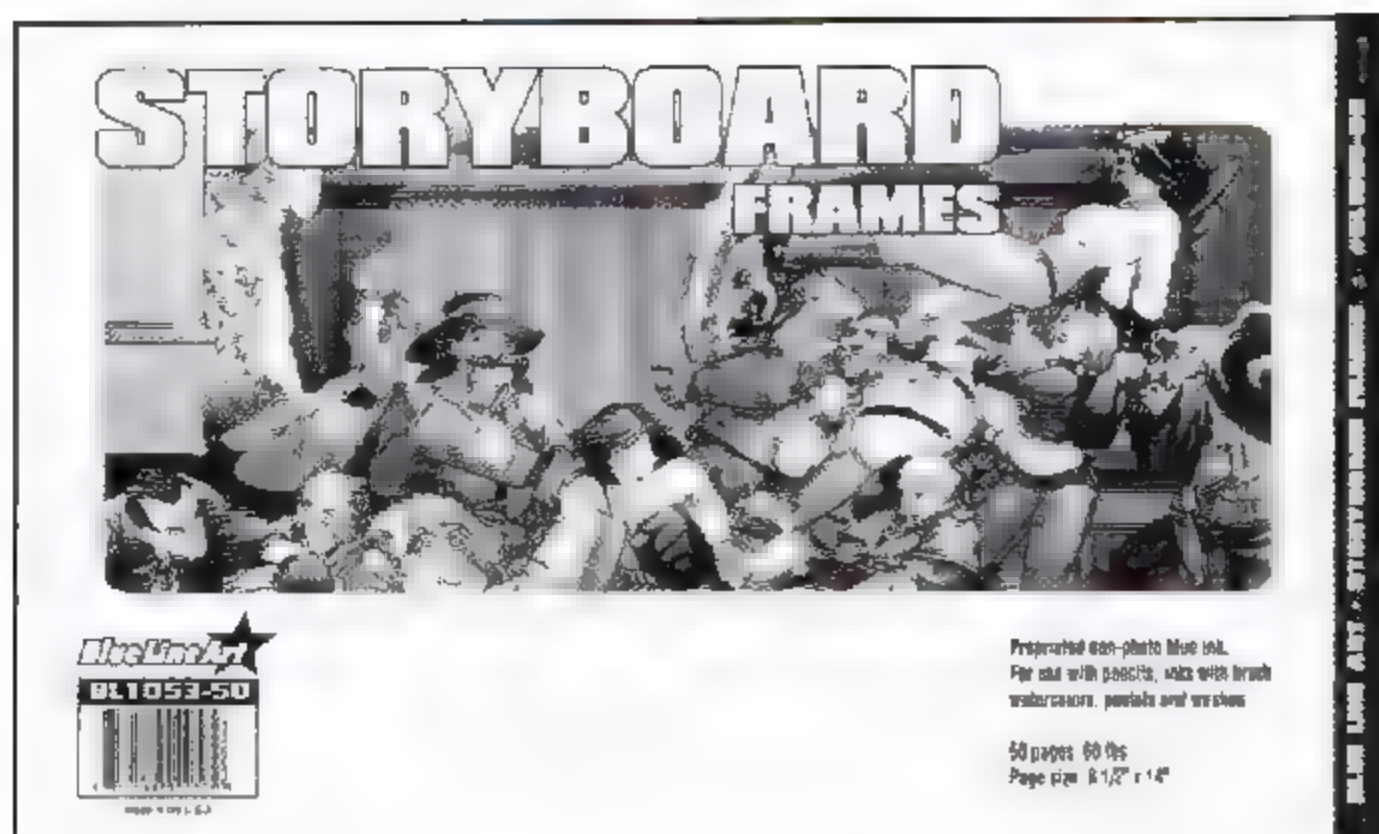
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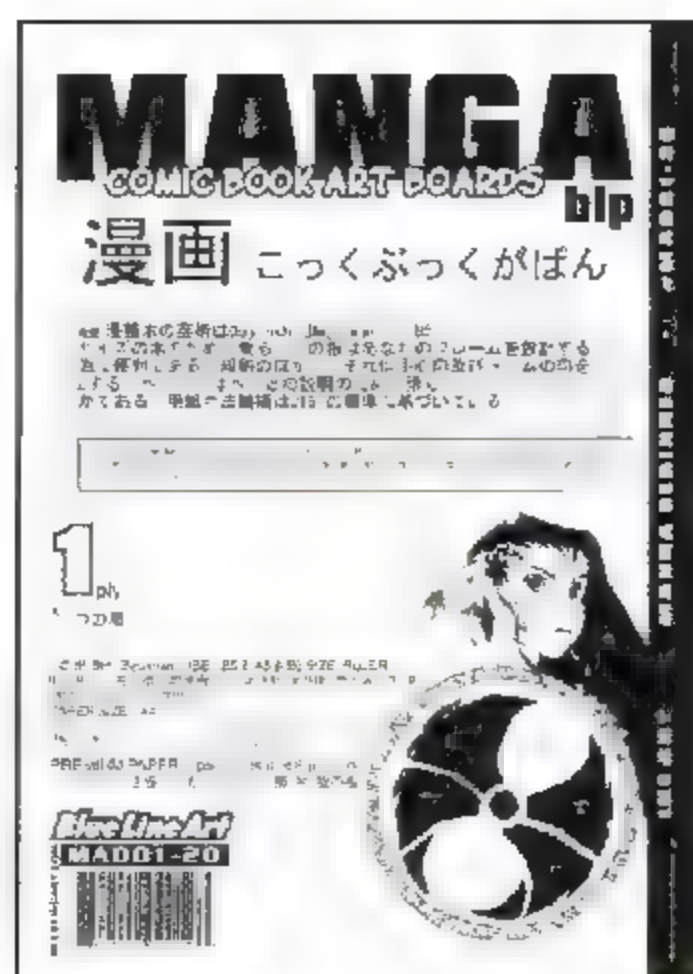
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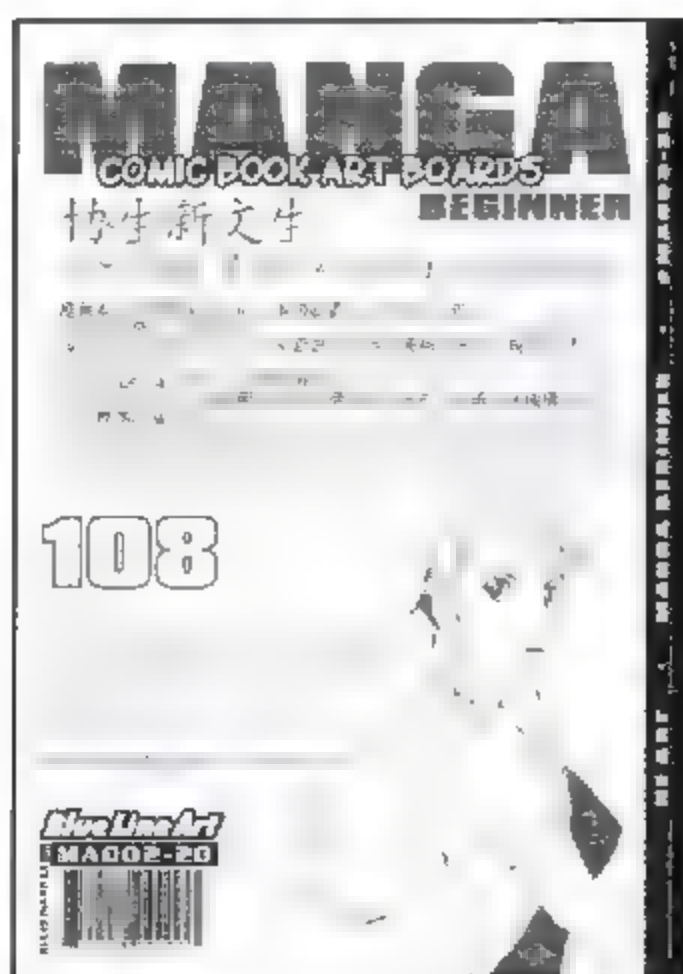
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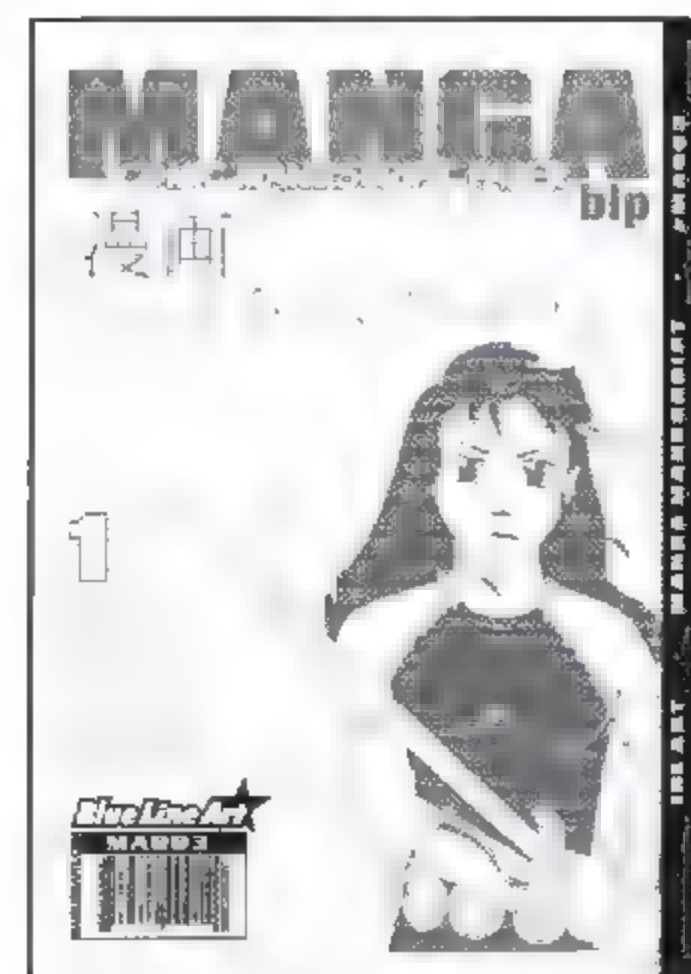
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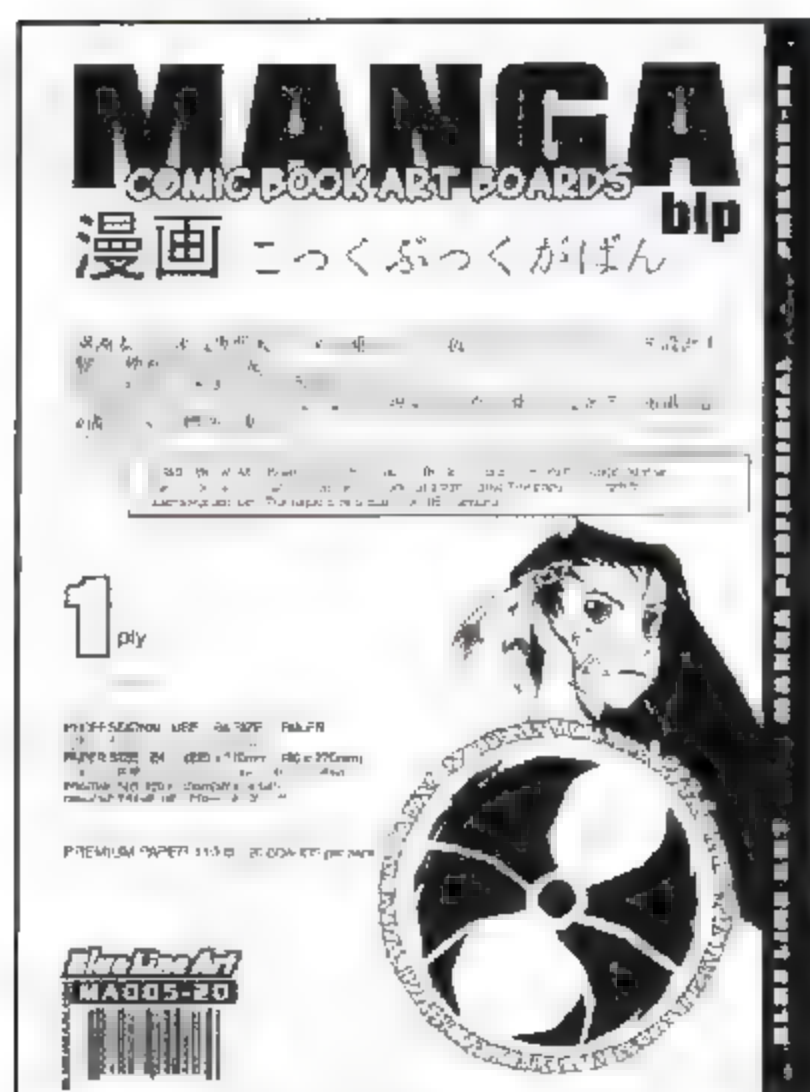
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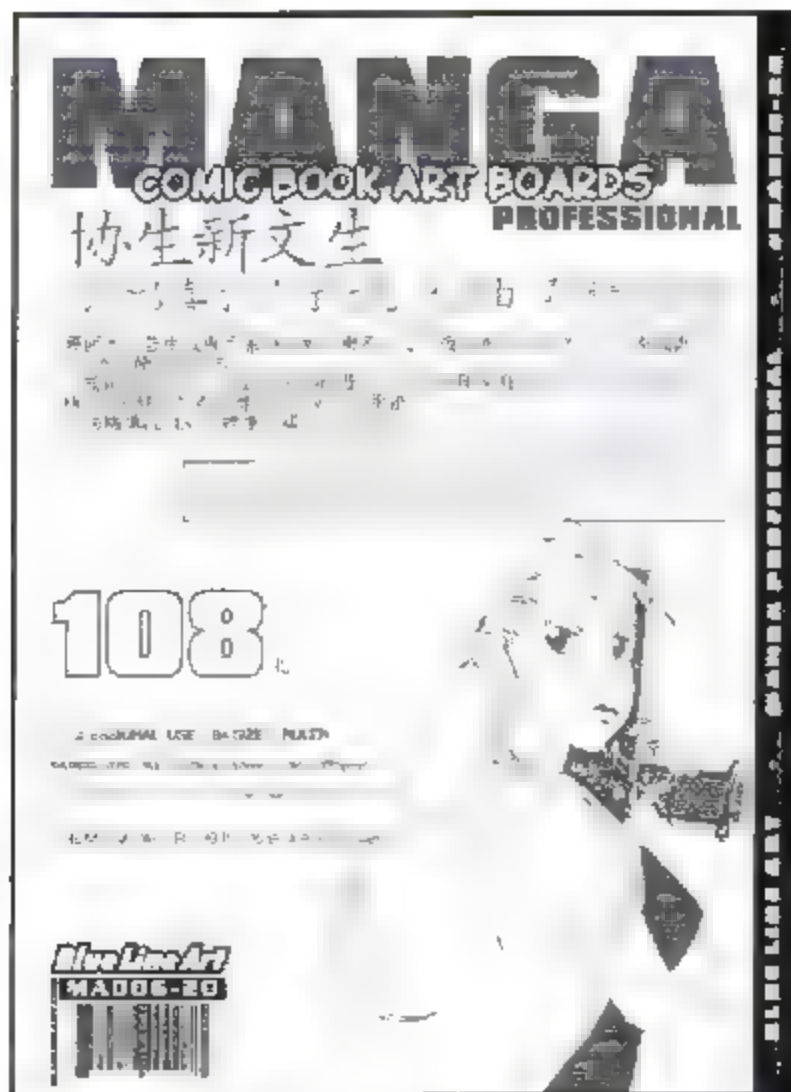
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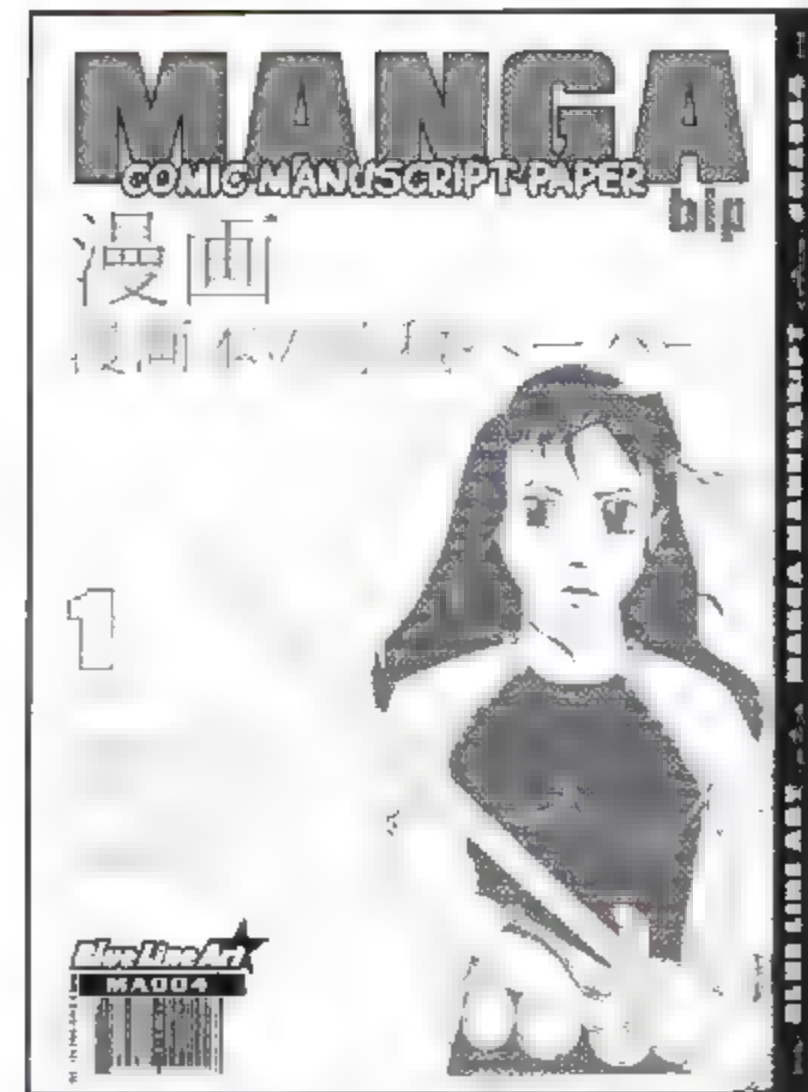
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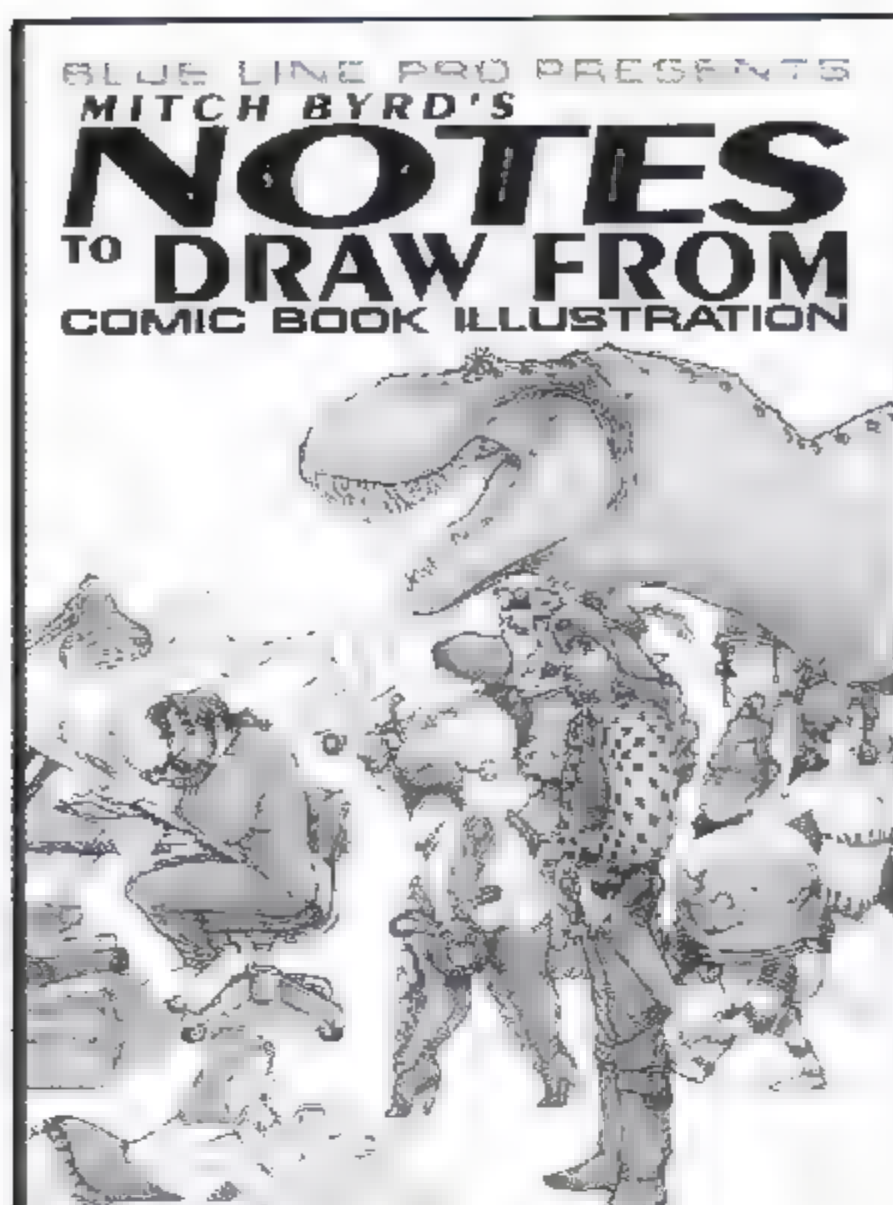
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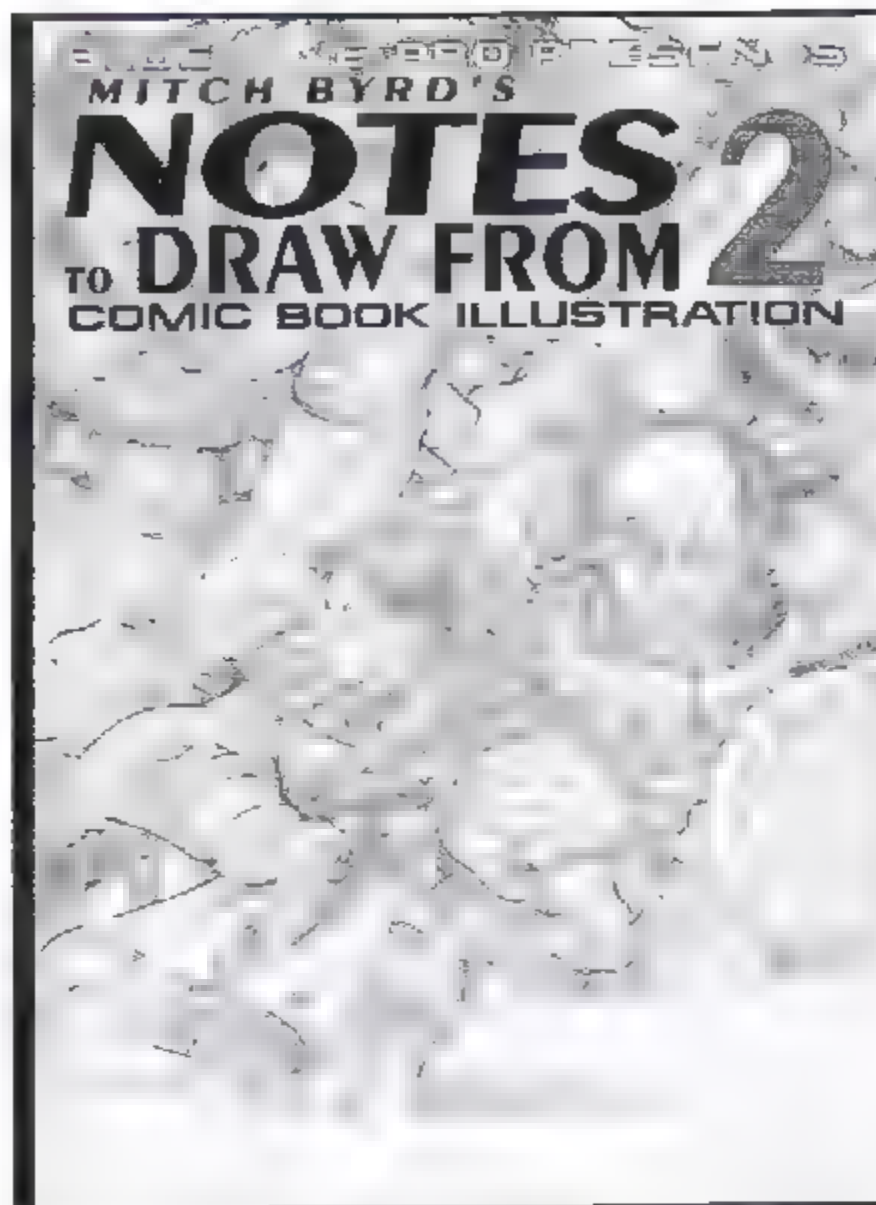


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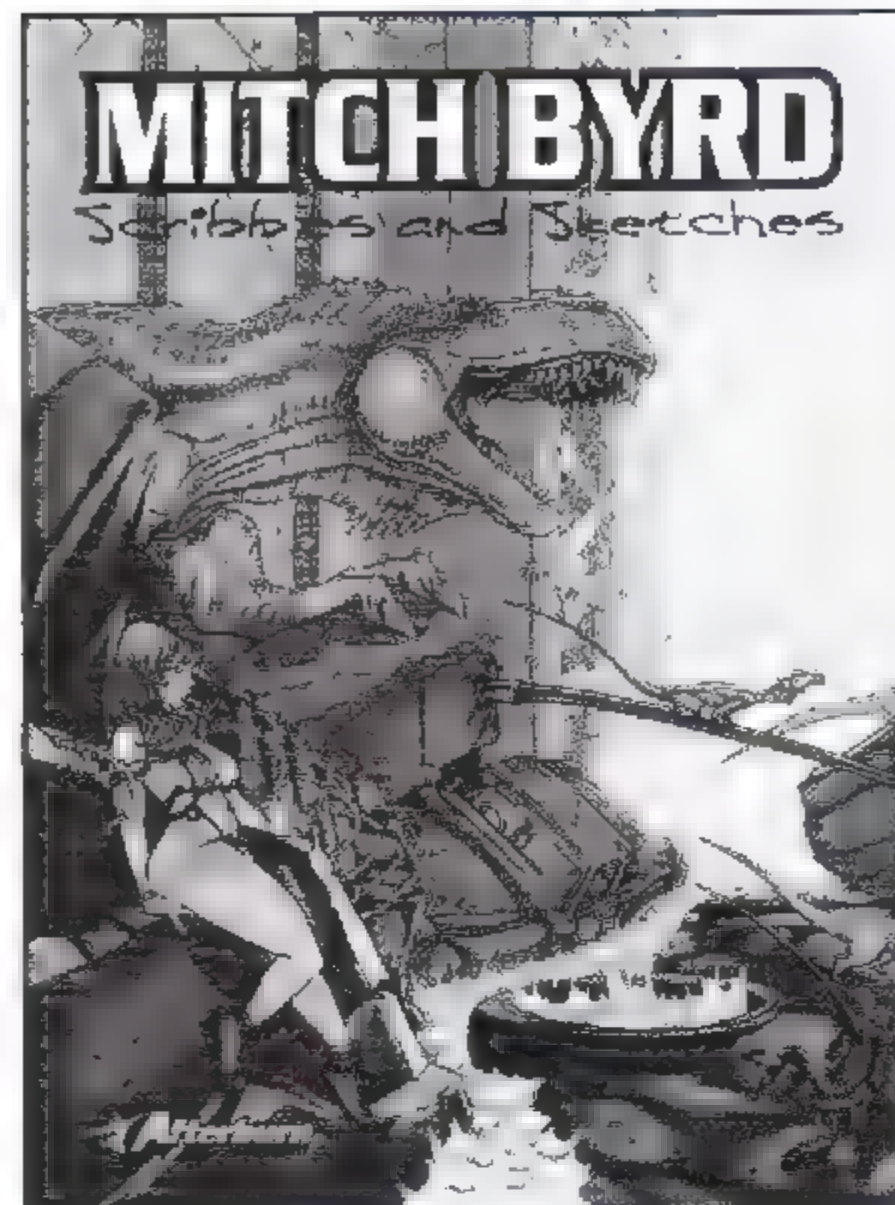
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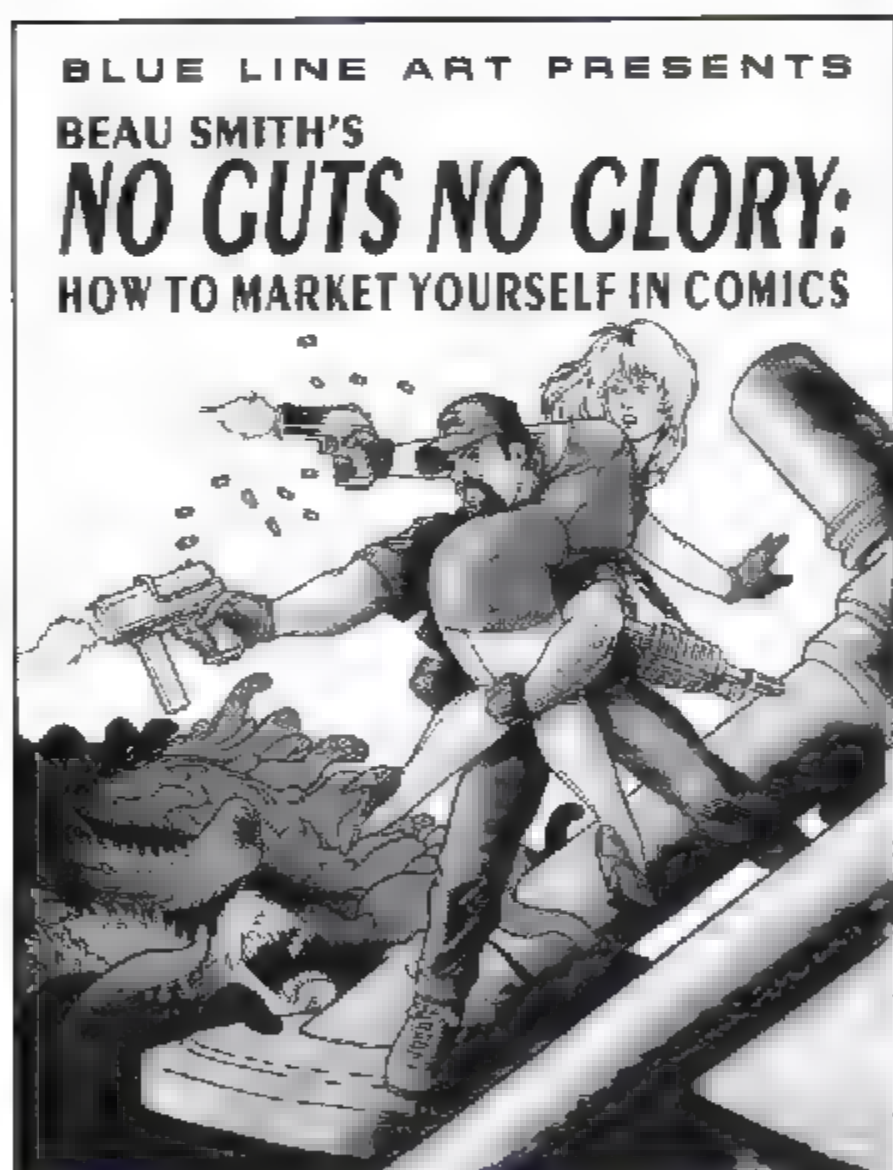
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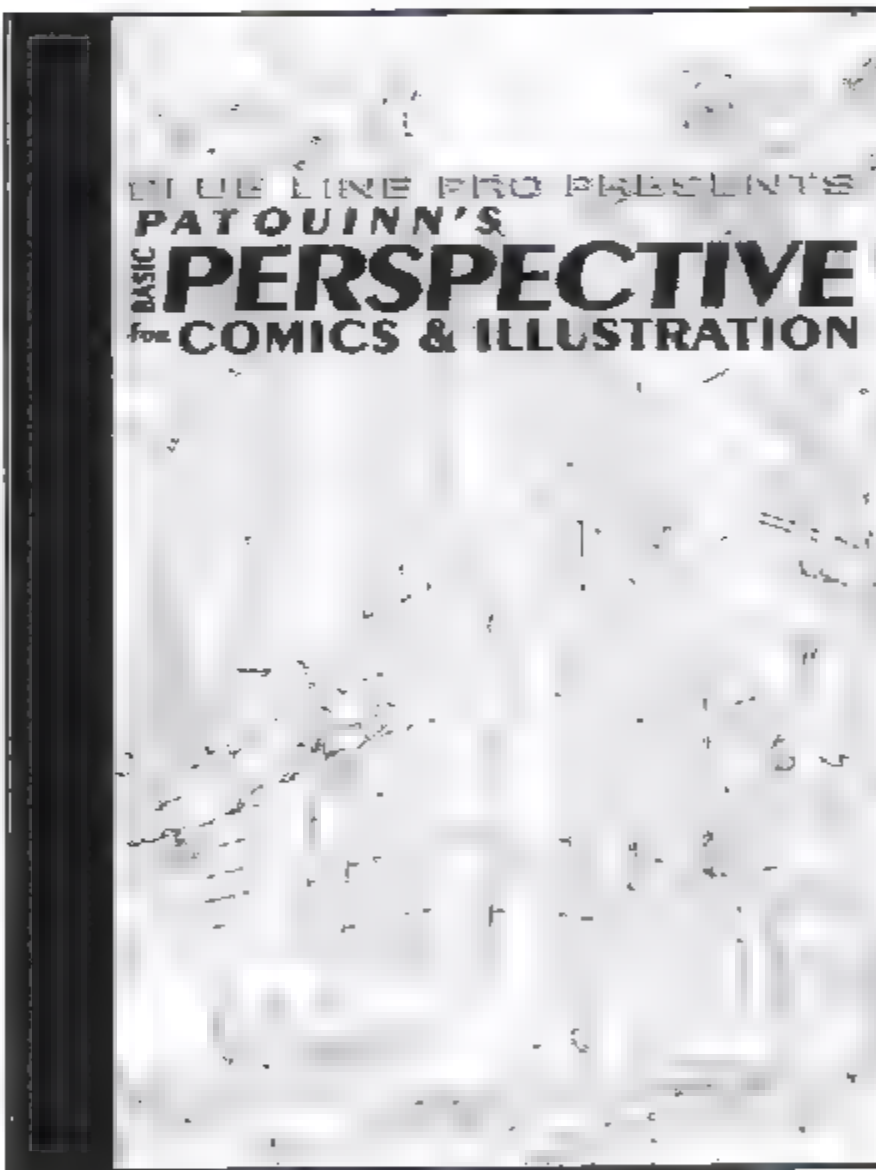


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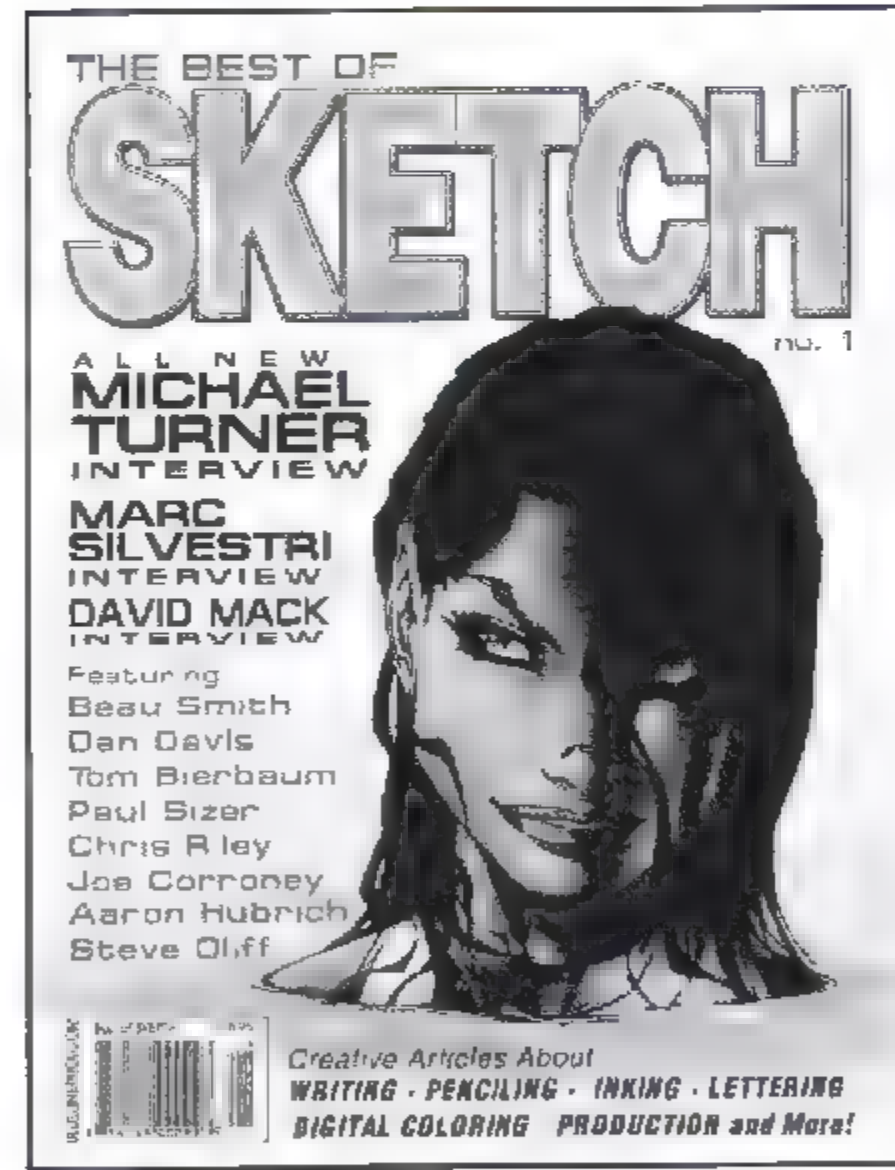
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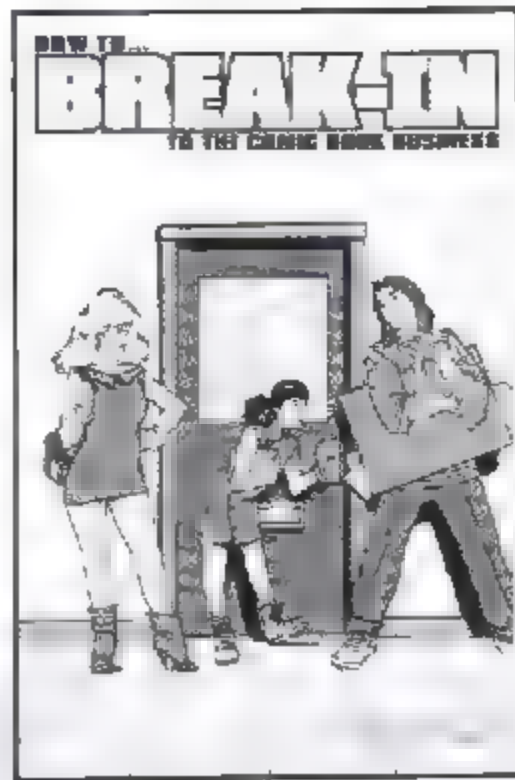
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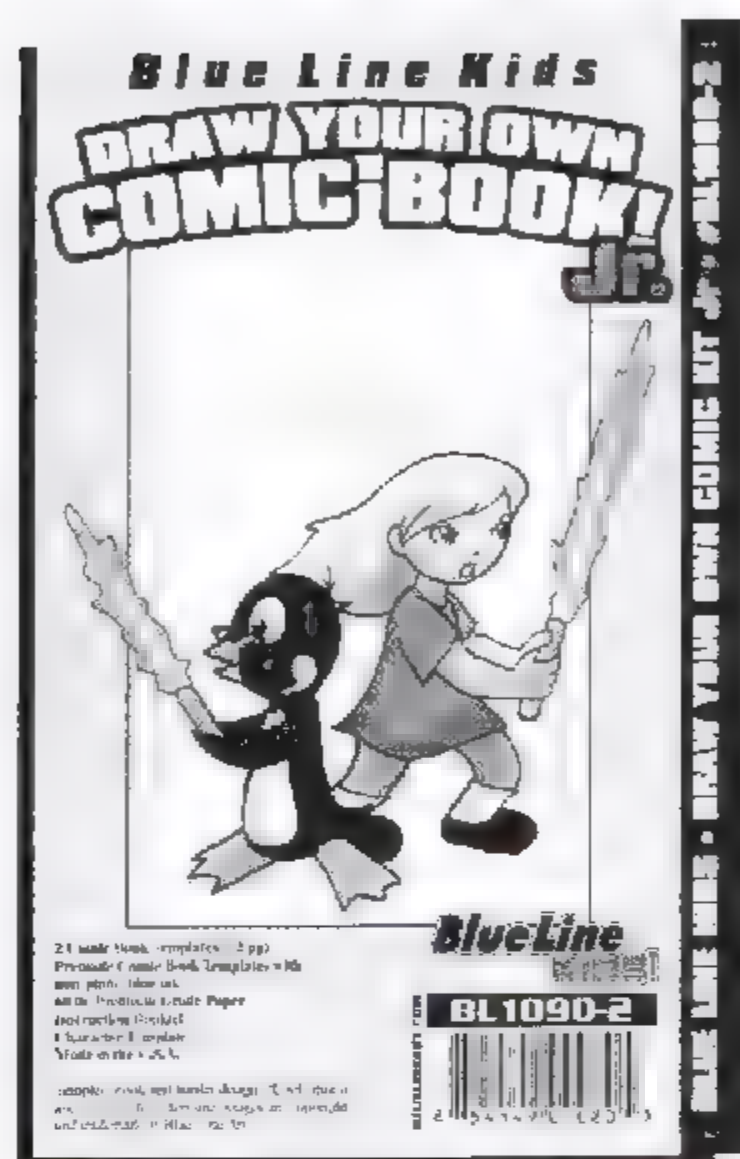
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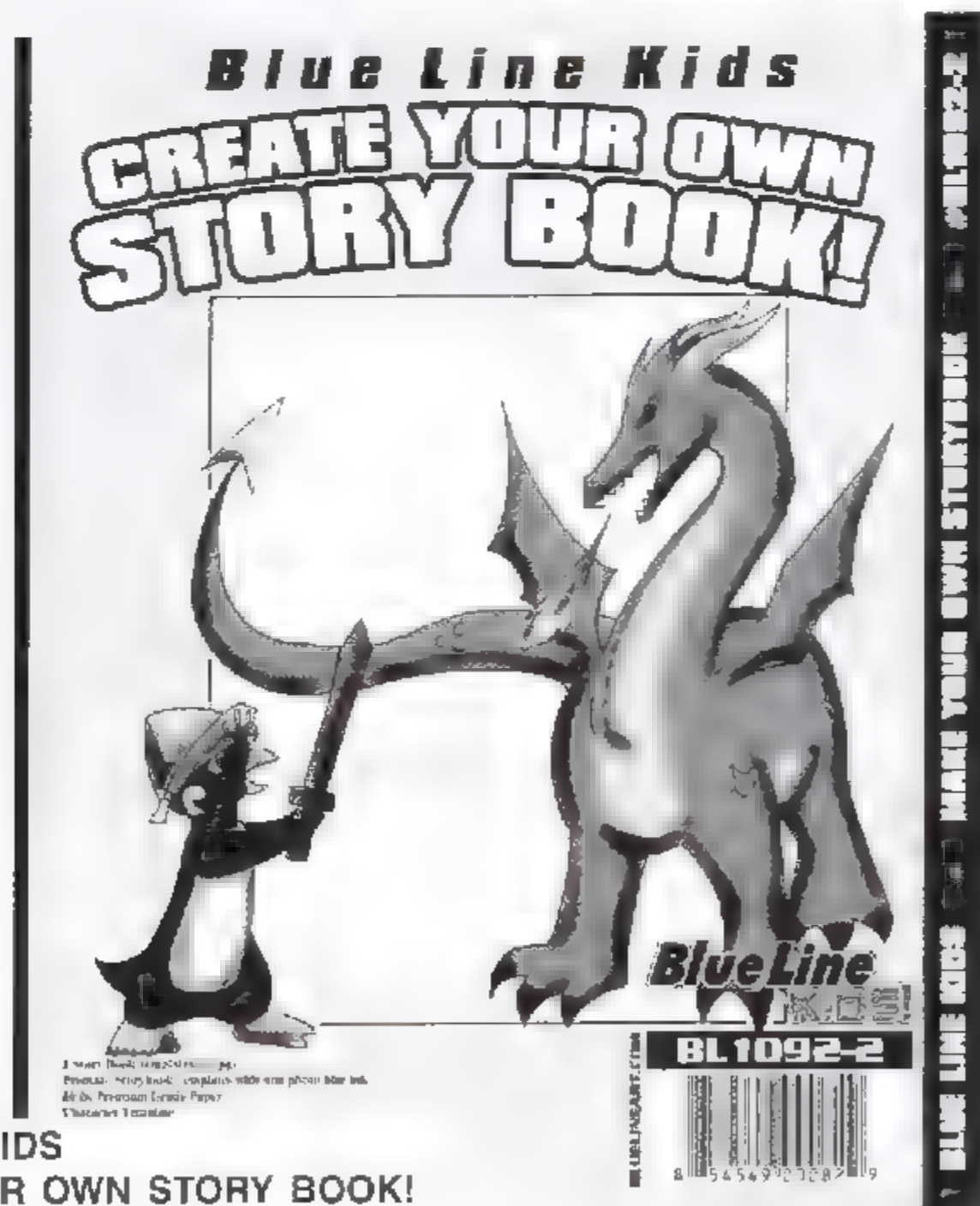
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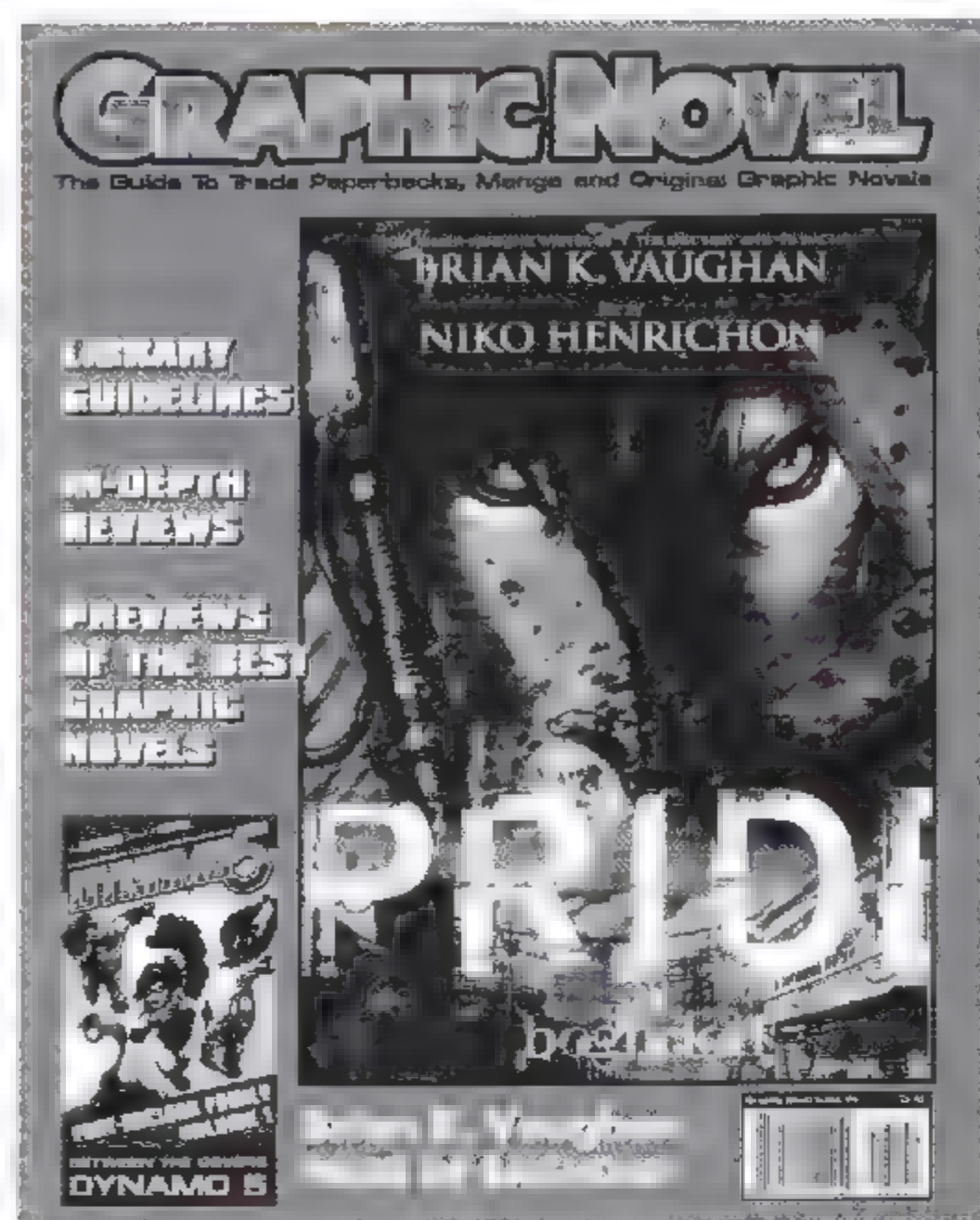
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## Writing Comics for Children

# The Children's Hour

by Sam Agro

Little girls love dolls and unicorns and little boys dig dinosaurs and fart jokes...

Uummm, not necessarily...

That kind of narrow thinking can get a writer into real trouble when writing comics aimed at kids. The fact is... *kids are people!*

Sure, when they are whining for toys at the mall or crying in the bank lineup it's easy to imagine they are some noisy, annoying alien race. But take my word for it: they *are* people. And, like any adult, they have personalities, interests and preferences, unique to each individual. Depending on broad generalizations will inevitably lead to bad kids writing.

Comics for kids are a growing market and afford many opportunities for writers who can adapt to the form. For the last several years I have been writing for DC's *Looney Tunes* book, and more recently for the Cartoon Network's DC comic *Block Party*. Here are a few thoughts about writing for this specialized market.

### Affinity

A paycheck can be a real motivator, certainly, but when writing for kids, (or for anything) I feel it's important to have some kind of affinity for the form. I am built for speed in this area. First, I suffer from a sorely arrested development. Second, I graduated from the Classical Animation course at *Sheridan College* and worked as a storyboard artist in the animation business for 30 years. So, it can certainly be said that I dig the kid's stuff.

If you find this stuff boring, juvenile, or beneath your contempt, you will *not* write it well. I don't think anyone can pull off the trick of being entertaining in a form they don't enjoy on some level. So, if you prefer politics and classical music to slapstick and silliness, don't attempt to write for kids.

### Research

Although most of my experience is primarily with comics based on animated cartoons, most of what I'll be offering here is applicable to any kind of kids writing. However, research is a task one must fully address when working on existing properties.

In the case of *Looney Tunes*, I had already done a vast amount of research. Being a huge fan of the classic WB cartoons, and having studied them extensively in college, I was good to go. However, that did not stop me from reviewing many of the cartoons, scanning some of the books I own on the subject, and even researching some of their vaudeville influences, like the Marx Brothers, the Ritz Brothers and Joe Besser. (Okay, that's further than

you need to go, but I'm a bit of a nut about that sort of thing.)

What's important is that you come to understand the tone of the property, the style of the humor, and the voices of the characters.

Your take on the characters must be compatible with the originals. Their speech patterns, (and speech impediments for WB characters), must feel natural and correct. Their character traits and motivations must ring true. Daffy Duck is the greedy, sneaky, wacky incompetent one, and Bugs Bunny is the mischievous, tricky and calmly capable one. And, unless some crazy mad scientist is switching their brains, that's who they have to be in your story.

Also, the general tone of the original material must be maintained. In the WB cartoons, they often address the camera, or otherwise break the "fourth wall" by referring to the writers, or having Daffy pitch ideas to producer Leon Schlesinger. The classic Chuck Jones cartoon *Duck Amuck* is a brilliant deconstructionist exercise based entirely on this type of gag, so it's perfectly okay to do this in a *Looney Tunes* story. Conversely, in *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends*, they *do not* break the fourth wall. They maintain the integrity of the show's "conceit", and so must you.

As part of my research I also read the *Looney Tunes* comic. It differs in some small ways from the original cartoons, and it was important for me to know that. For



instance, they had "old school" stories in there, much like the original cartoons, but they also had more modern subject matter. They often depicted the characters using computers, or competing in extreme sports, etc. This is an effort to appeal to what kids are doing today as opposed to 1948.

Cartoons are readily available on television and on DVD, and there is information on every cartoon imaginable on the internet, so there is simply no excuse for not doing your homework, and getting it right.

### Pitching

I have had the pleasure of working with no end of thoughtful, talented and brilliant editors at DC. (*Rule #1: Always suck up to your editor*) So, whenever I pitch something I am confident it will be a productive experience.

In the past these pitches were probably made verbally, but today it's all about the E-mail. Generally, I send in concise, one paragraph breakdowns of several ideas for consideration. Here's an example of one that eventually became a published story:

#### **Bugs Booty** (8 pages)

Since pirates are all the rage, I thought we could have Bugs stowed away in a shipment of spices and carrots bound for England. Fearsome buccaneer Yosemite Sam threatens the ship and its cowardly officers give up without a fight due to his bloodthirsty reputation. Bugs, however, acts as the last line of defense, tricking Sam over and over with bone crushing results until he gives up pirating forever and becomes a turkey farmer.

Your pitch should have everything your story will have. A beginning (the premise) a middle (the conflict) and an end (the resolution). This pitch establishes the setting and premise, *Bugs stows away on a ship full of luxurious goods and pirates attack*, the conflict, *Bugs defends the ship against the pirates*, and *gets the better of Yosemite over and over*, and the conclusion, *Bugs wins and Yosemite gives up his pirate ways*. The details of how this is executed might vary from writer to writer, but this is a solid basis for a story.

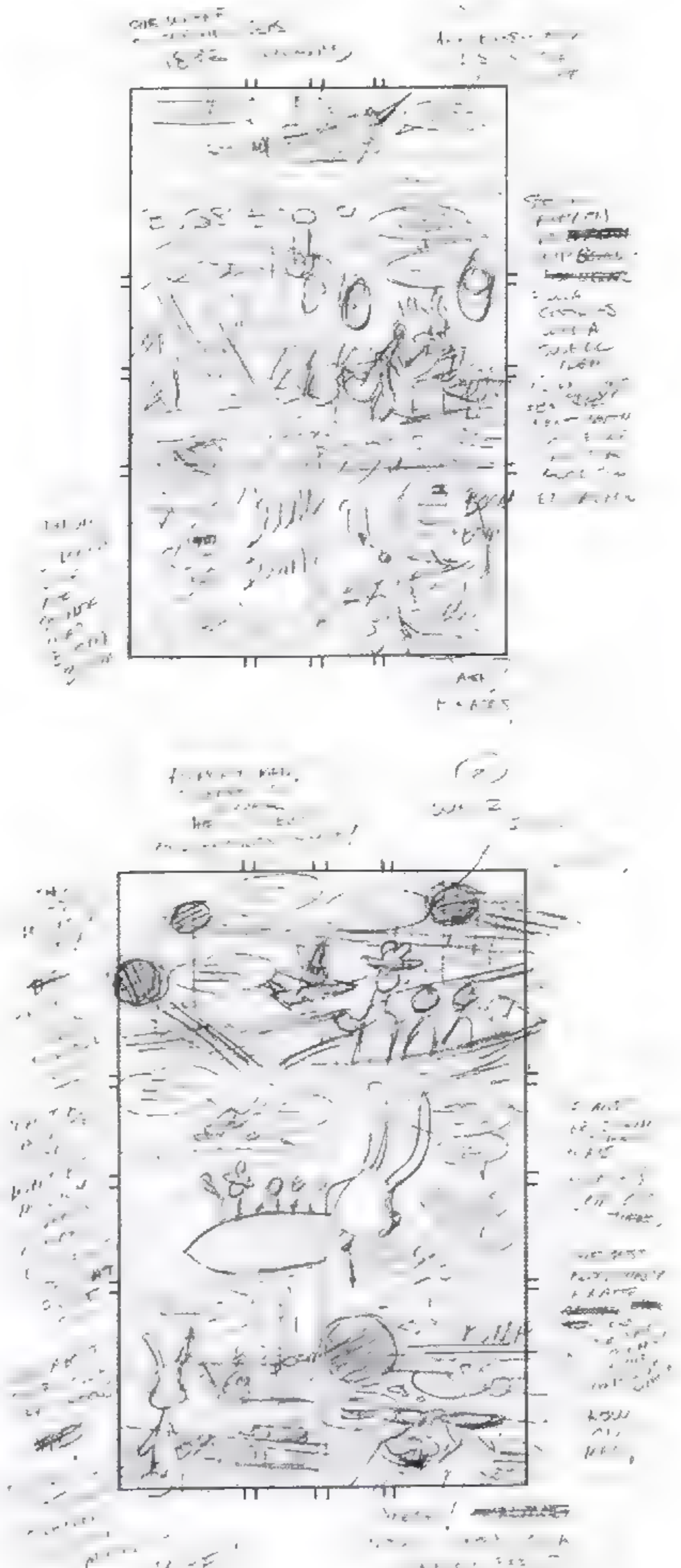
Your editor may then reject the idea outright, or suggest changes. They may suggest that a train robbery setting is more appropriate for Yosemite Sam. Or, more likely, they will suggest the ending is weak, or that the details of the conflict are too vague, or offer some funny gag you might include in an expanded pitch. These are suggestions, and you should feel free to spritz back and forth with the ideas until you reach a common ground... depending on the editor, of course! However, most editors are wonderful, open minded, collaborative people. (*How's that for sucking up?*)

In the case of animation-based comics, the final pitch is then sent to the property holder for another round of approvals. Usually the idea is simply accepted or rejected. However, sometimes it will come back with changes from

the client. Unlike changes from the editor, client suggestions are non-negotiable and must be incorporated into the final story.

### Script Breakdown

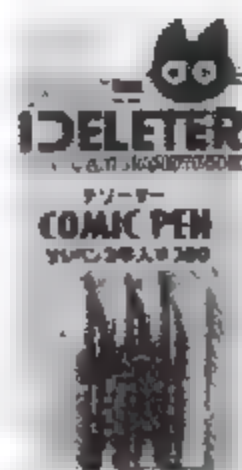
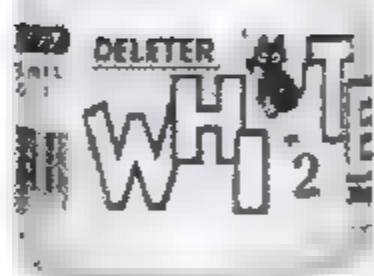
Okay, so, the client has approved your idea, and you are ready to create a final script. Here I take a step that is generally uncommon, but which I think is a good one. Being a cartoonist as well as a writer, I sketch out very rough page breakdowns of the story. Here is an example from "Bugs Booty"





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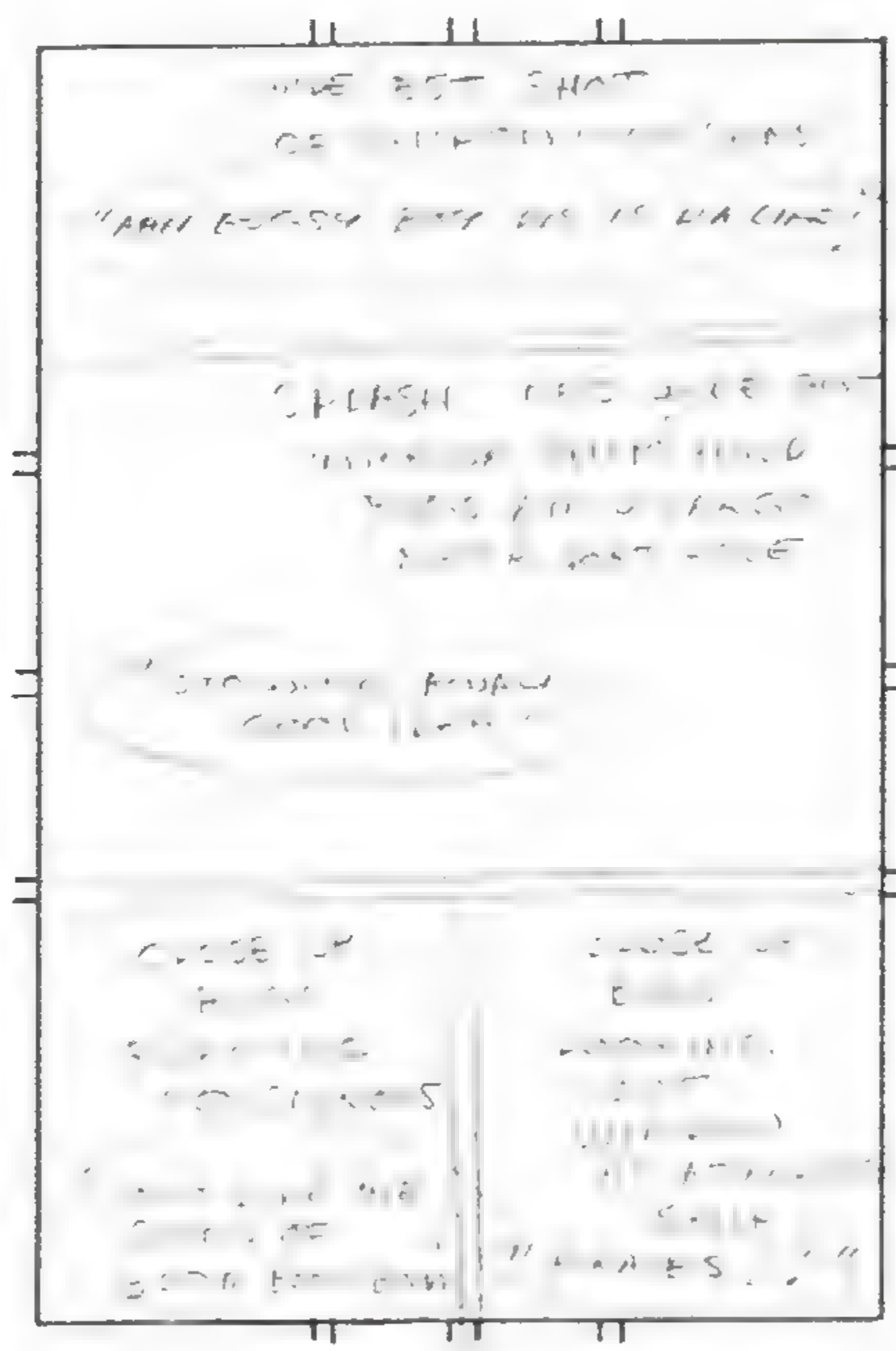


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## writing & layouts

As you can see, I am not going for a Da Vinci level of finish here. These are very rough breakdowns to help me pace out the story and make sure the flow and continuity is clear before I write the final script. I also jot in rough dialogue and captions at this point as well. The degree of finish on the dialogue here is more a matter of my mood than anything else. It just needs to cover the basic beats of the story, you can polish it later when scripting. It is always a challenge for a writer to think visually, and I think many could benefit from this step.

Okay I hear you yelling at me now. "Sam, I'm a writer damn it! I can't draw a straight line!" The truth is you don't have to be Michealangelo to use this process. You can do it with simple stick figures, or even just break it down into panels and write in what you think is going on in the panel, like so:



Creating a physical, visual representation of the page will still open your eyes to the "real world" pacing of the panels. It will help you think more visually, and facilitate panel descriptions that the artist will clearly understand. Give it a try, you might find it helpful.

### The Script

This is the final stage of your process, and it's where you really need to shine. Working for DC, I work in the "full script" style, where the writer writes out each panel description. I'm going to detail that approach here. Here is a sample page from *Bugs Booty*.



**Page 1** (4 panels)

PANEL 1: THE HIGH SEAS. 1832, DAY. WIDE SHOT ON A MERCHANT SHIP FROM THE 1800'S, SAILING PEACEFULLY ON CALM SEAS. \*NOTE: THIS PANEL IS NOT THE SPLASH PANEL, BUT A THIN PANEL ACROSS THE FULL WIDTH OF THE PAGE.

CAPTION: Somewhere on the high seas, 1832.

BUGS: (unseen on the ship) Ahh Buggy, dis is the life...

PANEL 2: **1/2 PAGE SPLASH**. INTERIOR SHIP'S HOLD, DAY. BELOW DECKS IN THE HOLD OF THE SHIP THE SPACE IS FILLED WITH LOTS OF MERCHANT GOODS BEING TRANSPORTED TO ENGLAND. BAGS OF SUGAR AND GRAIN, CRATES OF SILKS, LINENS, AND VEGETABLES, HANGING NET SACKS OF GOOD STUFF, ETC. MAKE IT LOOK NICE AND CROWDED, BUT RELATIVELY NEATLY ARRANGED. WE SHOULD ALSO SEE THE STEPS UP TO THE EXIT OF THE HOLD. IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS, NEAR THE HULL OF THE SHIP, WE SEE **BUGS BUNNY** RELAXING IN A BOX LABELED "SILKS". HE IS LOUNGING ON SEVERAL BRIGHTLY COLORED BOLTS OF SILK AND IS CHEWING ON A CARROT. NEARBY IS ANOTHER CRATE LABELED "CARROTS" WHICH IS OPEN AND BURSTING WITH THE ORANGE VEGGIES. \*NOTE: THERE SHOULD BE A FEW PORTHOLE WINDOWS ON THE WALL AND ONE SHOULD BE NEAR BUGS' HEAD.

TITLE: Bugs Booty

CREDITS: Story by Sam Agro, etc.

BUGS: Stowing away on dis ship fulla goodies, was a swell idea!

BUGS: I'll be in the gravy all the way to En-ga-land!

PANEL 3: MEDIUM CLOSE UP OF BUGS REACTING WITH SOME ALARM TO THE SOUND EFFECTS OF "BOOMS" COMING FROM OUTSIDE THE SHIP.

SFX: Boom! Boom! Boom!

BUGS: Uh-oh! I don't like the sound of dat boom, boom, boom!

PANEL 4: CLOSE UP OF BUGS LOOKING OUT THE PORTHOLE WINDOW. WE SEE A MENACING LOOKING PIRATE SHIP OUT THE WINDOW WITH CANNONS BLAZING IN THE DIRECTION OF BUGS' SHIP. IF POSSIBLE IT WOULD BE NICE TO SEE A SMALL PIRATE-CLOTHES CLAD **YOSEMITE SAM** ON THE DECK, WEILDING A SABER.

BUGS: Gasp! It's a buccaneer type pirate ship!

BUGS: They could wreck me sweet life of leisure!

**Action**

The order of the day here is to keep descriptions of the action clear and compact. More complex panels will require greater detail in the description, simpler panels will require less. It's a full script, so I want to be understandable, while leaving the artist some leeway to express himself. I find the 'Alan Moore' level of minute description quite unnecessary for anyone who isn't, well... *Alan Moore*! Forcing your artist to wade through paragraphs of description for one panel, and micro-managing everything to the point of insanity really just wastes everybody's time.

It takes you longer to write, it takes the artist longer to read, and execute, and can cause the artist to feel his contribution is unimportant. Plus, the level of resonating, repeating visual motifs, recurring shot patterns and pinpoint pacing evident in a piece like *Watchmen* is rather a bit much to impose on an eight page *My Gym Partner is a Monkey* story. Just hit on the important stuff, and keep it simple, clear and succinct.

A word about pacing for kids comics. If you are writing a superhero comic for George Perez, you may want to have a dozen or so panels on some pages. However, generally, (with the exception of the splash page), I think a page for a kids comic should have from 4 to 6 panels. You could go less if you have a really big complicated sight gag that requires a huge panel, and on occasion for the sake of clarity you may go as high as 7 panels, but really that's the *limit*. Any more than that and you create a page that might put off a young reader with it's appearance of complexity. Also, since more panels means smaller panels, this will limit your artist's ability to have fun with the broad actions of the cartoony characters.

**Dialogue**

The same theory of concise simplicity applies to dialogue, with the added twist that the personalities and speech patterns of the characters must be evident. The dialogue needs to be succinct for three reasons. **One:** Shorter, punchier dialogue is typical of most animated cartoons. **Two:** Comics also have a tradition of tight dialogue. **Three:** Tighter dialogue is, in my opinion, better dialogue.

In addition, as the action comes to it's climax, you will want to use shorter dialogue and fewer word balloons per panel. This will move your reader through the story faster at those points, and create a sense of pace and urgency.

Like the number of panels per page, you will also want to limit the number of word balloons per panel. Generally, I



suggest 1 to 3 word balloons in a single panel. Again, this is just a guideline and you may go higher on occasion to fill out a punch line, or in a situation where many very short lines are being said back and forth quickly by certain characters. But generally 3 is the limit. A seven or eight year old kid doesn't want the text in her Powerpuff Girls story to resemble a page from War and Peace. She wants to see her favorite characters kicking bad guy butt! So, keep the lines short and punchy, and the number of balloons in check. In addition, too many word balloons can crowd the art, and kids enjoy the pretty pictures.

## Elegance

A few words on self editing, and elegance in dialogue. It may seem a bit pretentious to suggest that the dialogue for any comic book might be elegant, but it really isn't. I'm not suggesting that you need to make every line a poem. I'm really referring to creating a line that has flow, clarity and rhythm.

Here's an example of a dialogue sequence that might be considered workable but a bit clunky:

### Page 1 (4 panels)

PANEL 1: 1/3 PAGE SPLASH. WIDE SHOT, HALFWAY UP A MOUNTAIN SOMEWHERE IN THE HIMALAYAS. DAY. **DAFFY DUCK** IS ON A SNOWY MOUNTAIN PLATEAU, WITH MORE MOUNTAIN ABOVE AND BELOW HIM. DAFFY IS DRESSED IN A PARKA AND IS CARRYING A HUGE LOAD OF MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY GEAR. CAMERAS, TRIPODS, LIGHT METERS, ETC. NEARBY, IS **BUGS BUNNY** WALKING TOWARD HIM. BUGS IS WEARING ONLY A TOUQUE, AND IS CARRYING A SINGLE, OLD FASHIONED FLASH CAMERA FROM ABOUT 1948, WITH POP OUT FLASH BULBS. BEHIND A ROCK SOMEWHERE NEARBY A **YETI** IS PEEKING OUT TO SECRETLY OBSERVE THE TWO PHOTOGRAPHERS.

DAFFY: Daffy Duck, you are one ingenious little black duck.

DAFFY: The whole world wants to see a real photo of the Abominable snowman, and once you snap that shot, the newspapers will be lining up to throw money at you!

DAFFY: And with all that delightful dough you can spend the rest of your life laying in the sun and drinking papaya smoothies with your old pal Bugs Bunny.

DAFFY: Wait a minute! Bugs Bunny?

PANEL 2: MEDIUM WIDE SHOT OF DAFFY STALKING ANGRILY TOWARD BUGS, DROPPING BITS OF HIS PHOTOGRAPHY GEAR AS HE WALKS. BUGS IS CALM AND COOL.

SFX: (dropping equipment) Clink. Clunk. Plink.

DAFFY: All right rabbit, just what are you doing here?

BUGS: I hear there's some kinda abdominal snowman monster up in these mountains dat everyone is dying to see caught on film. I thought I'd try and get the shot.

PANEL 3: CLOSER ON DAFFY OVER BUGS' SHOULDER. BUGS IS CALMLY PUTTING A FLASH BULB INTO HIS CAMERA FLASH WHILE DAFFY RANTS.

DAFFY: It's abominable snowman, for your information...

DAFFY: ...and if anyone is going to get a picture of that bashful yeti and grab all those crinkly green reward dollars, it's gonna be me!

BUGS: Okay den, let the best man win!

Now, there's nothing really wrong with this dialogue. All the information is there, and the character voices are evident. But the lines are a bit long, and they could be more musical. Here is a revised version that is shorter, and hopefully more elegant:

DAFFY: Daffy you ingenious little genius you!

DAFFY: Once you snap a photo of the elusive Yeti, the newspapers will line up to throw money at you!

DAFFY: Then it's off to Bermuda for papaya smoothies with my old pal Bugs Bunny!

DAFFY: Wait a minute! Bugs Bunny?

PANEL 2: MEDIUM WIDE SHOT OF DAFFY STALKING ANGRILY TOWARD BUGS, DROPPING BITS OF HIS PHOTOGRAPHY GEAR AS HE WALKS. BUGS IS CALM AND COOL.

SFX: (dropping equipment) Clink. Clunk. Plink.

DAFFY: All right rabbit, just what are you doing here?



BUGS: I'm gonna snap a photo of that abdominal snowman everybody's talkin' about!

PANEL 3: CLOSER ON DAFFY OVER BUGS' SHOULDER. BUGS IS CALMLY PUTTING A FLASH BULB INTO HIS CAMERA FLASH WHILE DAFFY RANTS.

DAFFY: It's abominable snowman, for your information...

DAFFY: ...and I'm going to snap that photo and reap all those crinkly green reward dollars!

BUGS: Okay den, let the best man win!

I've tried to shorten each line where possible, eliminate redundant information, and give the lines a rhythmic quality. This version is shorter than the first by 55 words. That may not seem like much, but over the course of an eight page story, that could amount to three or four hundred words. More importantly I believe these lines have more flair than those in the original version.

Compare the first line:

DAFFY: Daffy Duck, you are one ingenious little black duck.

DAFFY: Daffy you ingenious little genius you!

In addition to being shorter and more cadenced, repeating the word 'genius' gives the line an amusing ungrammatical quality, and makes it sound even more like a Daffy Duck quip. I always strive to achieve this quality in all the lines of the story. All it takes is practice to get a natural sense of how to edit a line. Reading out loud also helps you to feel the difference between a clunky line and one that rolls trippingly off the tongue.

### Bringing the Funny

Many children's comics aim to be funny. Even the kid friendly versions DC's major superheroes, as seen in comics like *Super Friends*, are more whimsical than their grittier adult counterparts. It is important to have some affinity for comedy if you are going to write it successfully. I have been teaching and performing improv and sketch comedy for about 25 years, and as a teacher I can tell you not everyone has the knack for being funny. Also, it's dangerous to assume that because you crack up your friends after a few cocktails that this translates into being funny for a general audience. So, some soul searching, and some conferring with your (sober) friends and family may be needed to discover whether you have some comedic aptitude.

This subject of comedy could take up an entire encyclopedia, so we will only be able to touch on the very basic building blocks here. The most basic comedy components are the SETUP and PUNCHLINE. These work for both verbal and visual gags, or combinations of the two.

The setup provides the visual or verbal information needed to make the joke play. The punchline delivers the unexpected twist that creates the laugh.

Let's look at a classic "light bulb" joke.

**Q:** How many mystery writers does it take to screw in a light bulb?

**A:** Two: One to screw it almost all the way in and the other to give it

# ERASERS

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### a surprising twist at the end.

The setup here comes from our knowledge of mystery stories and our understanding of how a light bulb is inserted into a socket.

The punchline plays on the word "twist" and it's double meaning, and the quantifiable nature of the mystery genre.

Here's another example from my story *House of Horror*, (Looney Tunes #155).

Porky and Sylvester visit a wax museum. First they visit the Hall of Presidents, and in the setup panel we see them looking at several wax presidents, including Nixon in his famous "peace sign" pose.

**PORKY:** Ooooh, look at the hall of p-pe-pe-p-presidents! All the great l-leaders of our confeder- confeder-er, of our country!

In the gag panel we then see Porky and Sylvester entering the spooky gateway to the wax museum's house of horrors.

**PORKY:** Oh, b-be-be-b-boy! A house of horrors! I w-wonder if there's a Nixon statue in there too...

The Hall of Presidents and the Nixon statue in the first panel "sets up" the gag for the second panel. I'm providing the information needed, building up the status of Nixon in one panel and knocking it down in the next.

You can also deliver the expected result and still be funny. Everyone knows that the Coyote is going to be the victim of his own Roadrunner trap. Some backfires come as a surprise but many are 100% obvious. That doesn't stop them from being funny when they happen.

These are the basic elements of most comedy. They may be delivered more subtly or more obviously, they may be more slapstick or more esoteric, they may be based on character or on situation, but nearly all comedy boils down to setup and punchline.

### Developing Your Comedy Chops

Having performed regularly in front of all sorts of audiences for about a quarter of a century, (*Gad but I'm old!*) I have developed a pretty good radar for what's going to play as funny. No one hits the ball out of the park on every joke, but this experience with living, breathing laughter has been invaluable. If you plan to write comedy regularly, I strongly recommend getting some practical experience with people who can give you feedback.

Most major cities have improv or standup courses and I highly endorse taking a few. Over time the responses of teachers and fellow students can give you a real sense of

what is going to work and what isn't, in a relatively safe and heckle-free environment. If you enjoy it, you may want to try performing in front of a general audience, which can only further improve your understanding.

For those who aren't the performing type, consider live writing groups. I suggest live groups as opposed to internet groups, because it's all about hearing what actually elicits that involuntary laugh reaction. On the internet, someone may assure you your writing is funny, but written responses can be intellectualized. Coming to the conclusion that something is funny is never as truthful as actually laughing out loud.

Also, friends and family are an excellent sounding board. Read the stuff to them aloud if possible, to hear that glorious, addictive sound that is the involuntary guffaw.

Without question there is an awful lot more to comedy, but that should get you started.

### Kid Funny

Obviously writing for kids has it's own requirements, but the worst thing you can do is write *down* to them. Assuming they are short morons who have obvious tastes in comedy is a huge mistake. You want to keep things simple and direct, certainly, but that is true of comedy aimed at any sort of audience. I don't suggest attempting dry *Dorothy Parker* style wit for a *Camp Lazlo* story, but kids are pretty sharp and they can follow your drift if you are clear, concise and funny. Sure, you should include slapstick and sight gags, and of course you are going to use the occasional fart joke or pun, but that doesn't mean you have to be mercenary about it. Don't depend on broad generalizations. Write with your brain *and* your heart.

A good rule of thumb is, if it doesn't make you laugh it probably won't make a kid laugh.

Once you have developed your own sense of comedy, writing to please yourself is the best way to please your audience, regardless of their age.

See you in the funny papers.



# MAKING COMICS...EASY

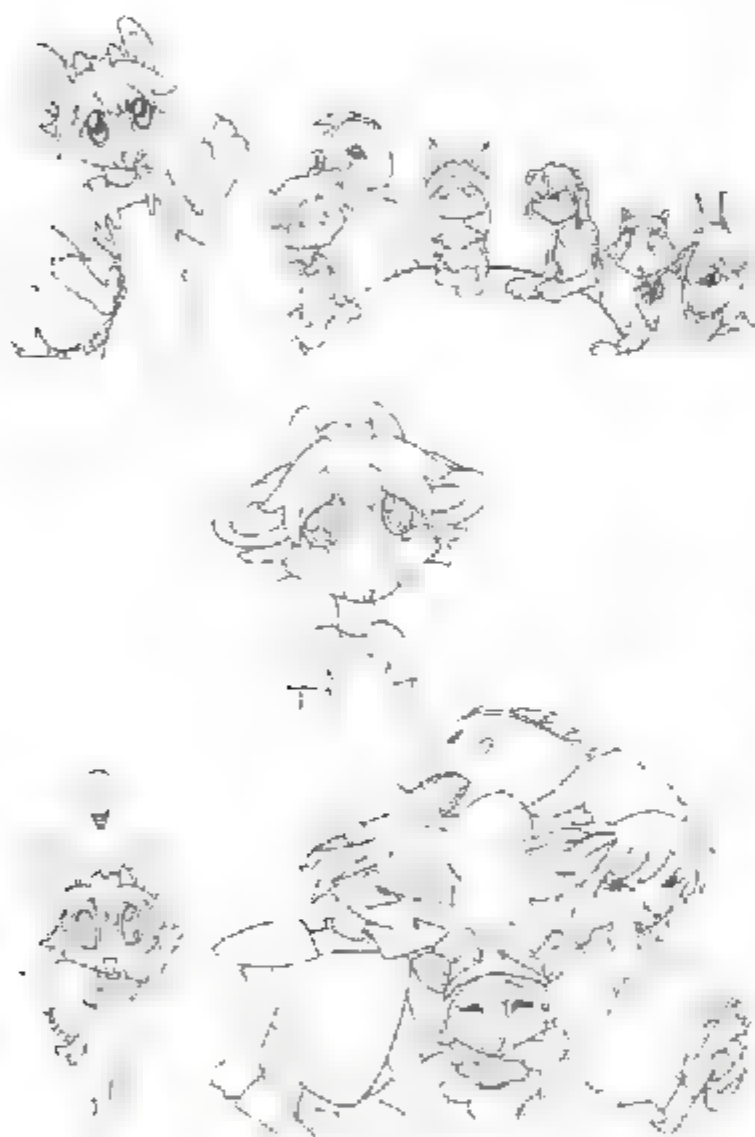
## GUTTERS AND BORDERS

Several years ago when we started to make comics, we hadn't really given much thought to exactly how much work it was going to be. With only two or three people doing the work that larger companies have entire staffs devoted to, we had to learn to make things as easy as possible on ourselves.

Neither of us had gone through any special kind of training, pertaining specifically to comic book creation, and we hadn't really spoken with many others in the comic book industry at the time, so it was up to us to come up with our own tricks and solutions to ease the work load on ourselves.

In some ways, that put us at an advantage. We weren't following in the footsteps of others, so it forced us to be creative with our solutions. Later, as we began to talk with friends, find out their solutions and compare notes on our work it became apparent to us that some of our solutions were not as commonplace as we had thought. We felt that they could be of great benefit in helping others save time, and frustration.

### GETTING STARTED



ORIGINAL IMAGE

When we create comics, the borders are typically drawn in at the blue line stage, and skipped over during the inks. If the inks are on the original piece, the blue lines are preserved in the scan, otherwise just keep them handy for reference.

This tip should be able to work on just about any version of Photoshop, particularly if you're using from 7.0 and up.

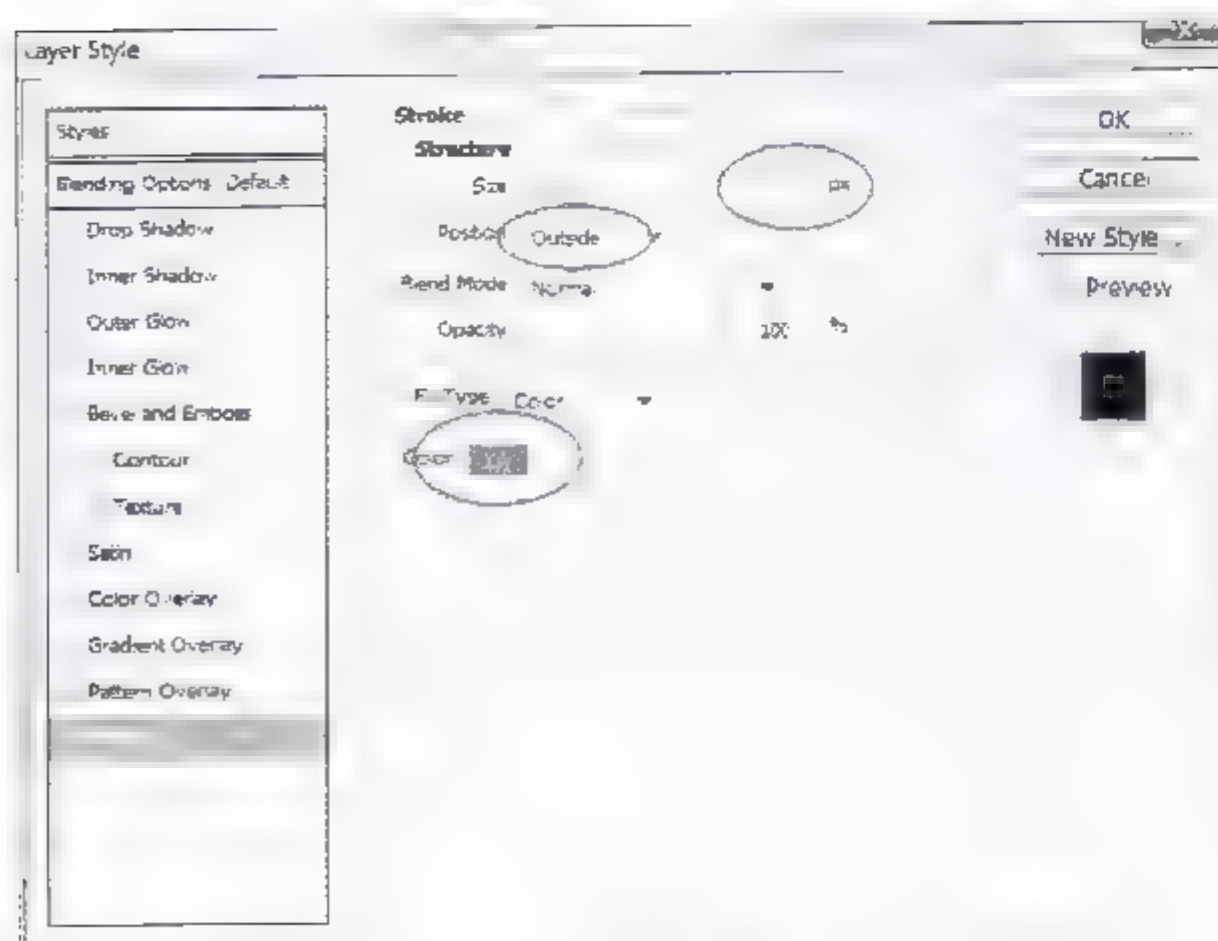
Start by creating a new layer above your lines layer.

Now, here's where the fun part starts. Go up to Layer, and click Layer Style > Stroke. A new dialogue box will pop up.

Now, here's where the important parts happen. By default, the color of the stroke is a bright red. Click on it, and change it to black (Or, whatever color you might be planning to use).



MAKE SURE YOUR BORDERS LAYER IS ABOVE YOUR LINES LAYER



THESE SETTINGS CAN BE CHANGED LATER, JUST SET YOURSELF WITH SOME LOOSE NUMBERS, AND DON'T FRET

Setting position to "Outside" (the default setting) will give you sharp, squared off corners. Setting it to "Inside" will give you a slightly rounded corner. For most purposes, you'll probably want to stick with "Outside".

Lastly, is "Size". This is the important part. The number you set here is going to depend on the resolution of your comic, and how thick you want the border around the panels to be. Since you can actually change this setting later, don't worry too much about finding the exact number to begin with.

Now, once you're finished with that, you're not going to notice any real change, but you're about to. If you have pre-arranged borders for margin, bleed, trim, and so forth you can use those to help you in this next part, but either way the technique will work.



## THE INITIAL OUTLINE

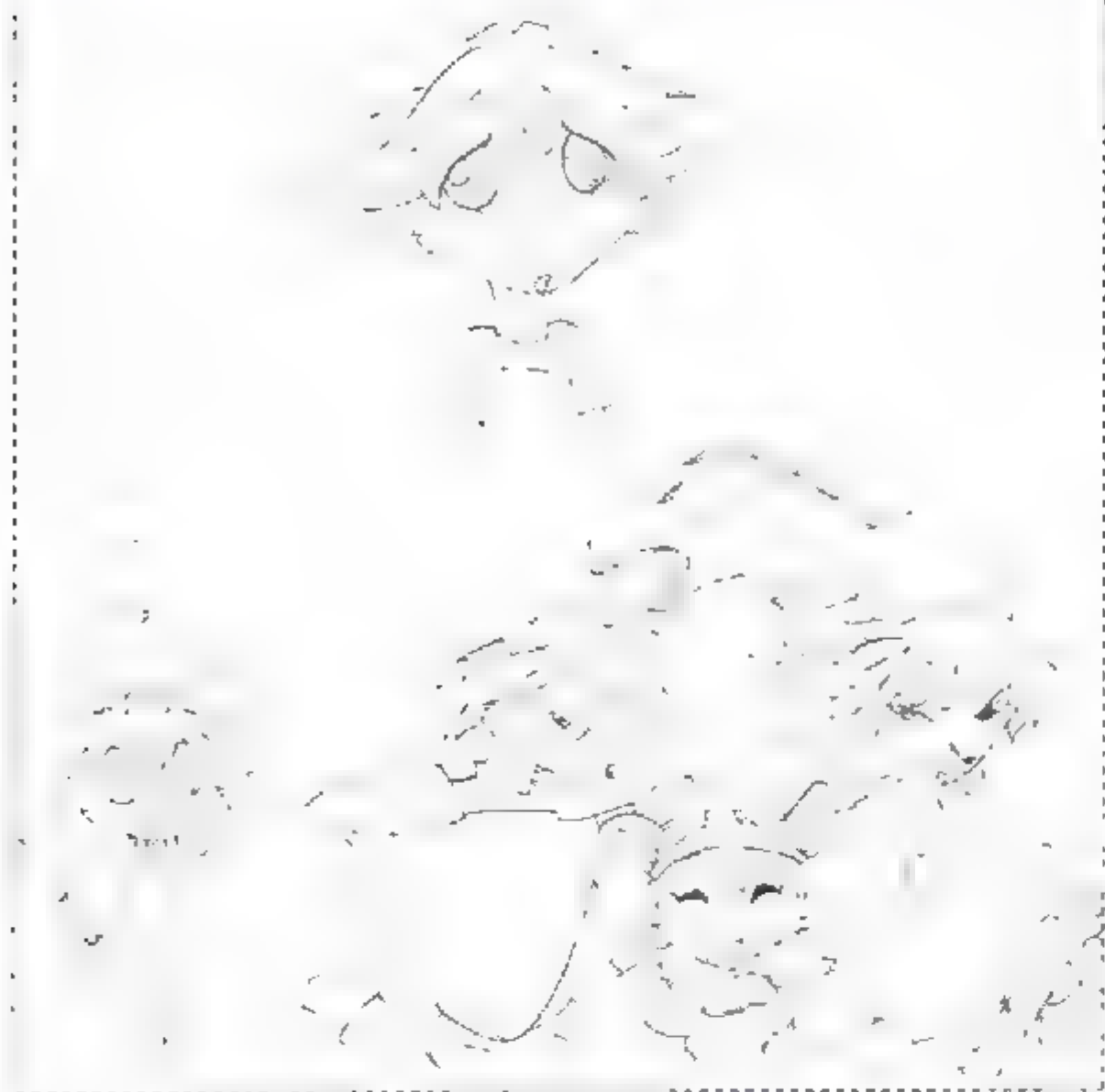


IMAGE BEFORE BORDER

Now, this is the part where you can take a few seconds to adjust the thickness of the lines, by going back to the layer style and adjusting the “Size” setting of the layer style.

Don't worry about being exact, the nice part about this technique is that you can make modifications without ever affecting your lines layer.

Select the basic area around your comic, like so.

Next, click **Select > Inverse**. The selection will look exactly the same, but now instead of having that square selected, everything but that square will be selected.

Make sure you're on the borders layer, where you applied your Stroke style.

Select white (or whatever color you like) and the paint bucket tool.

Click the outside area, and you'll suddenly have this:

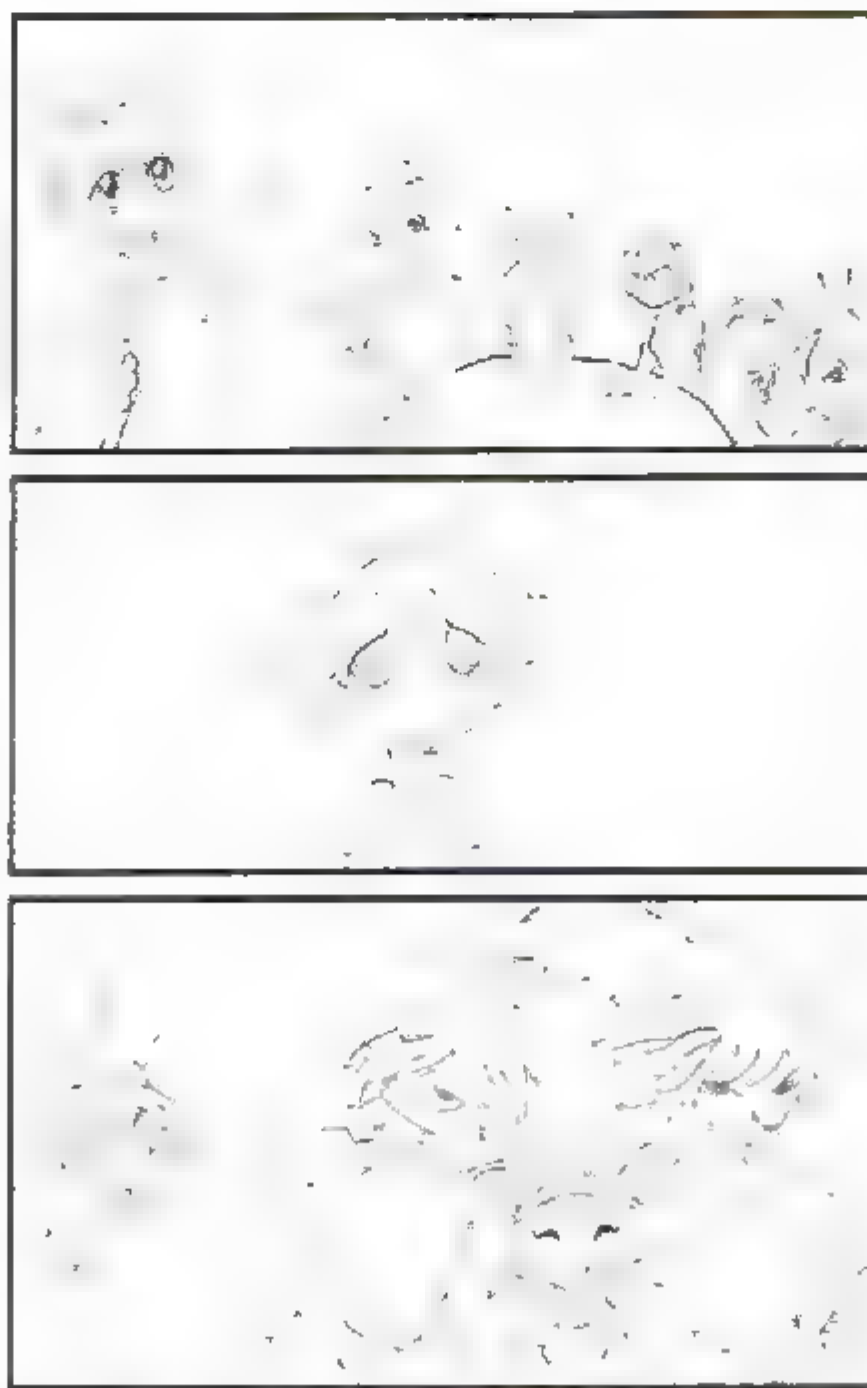
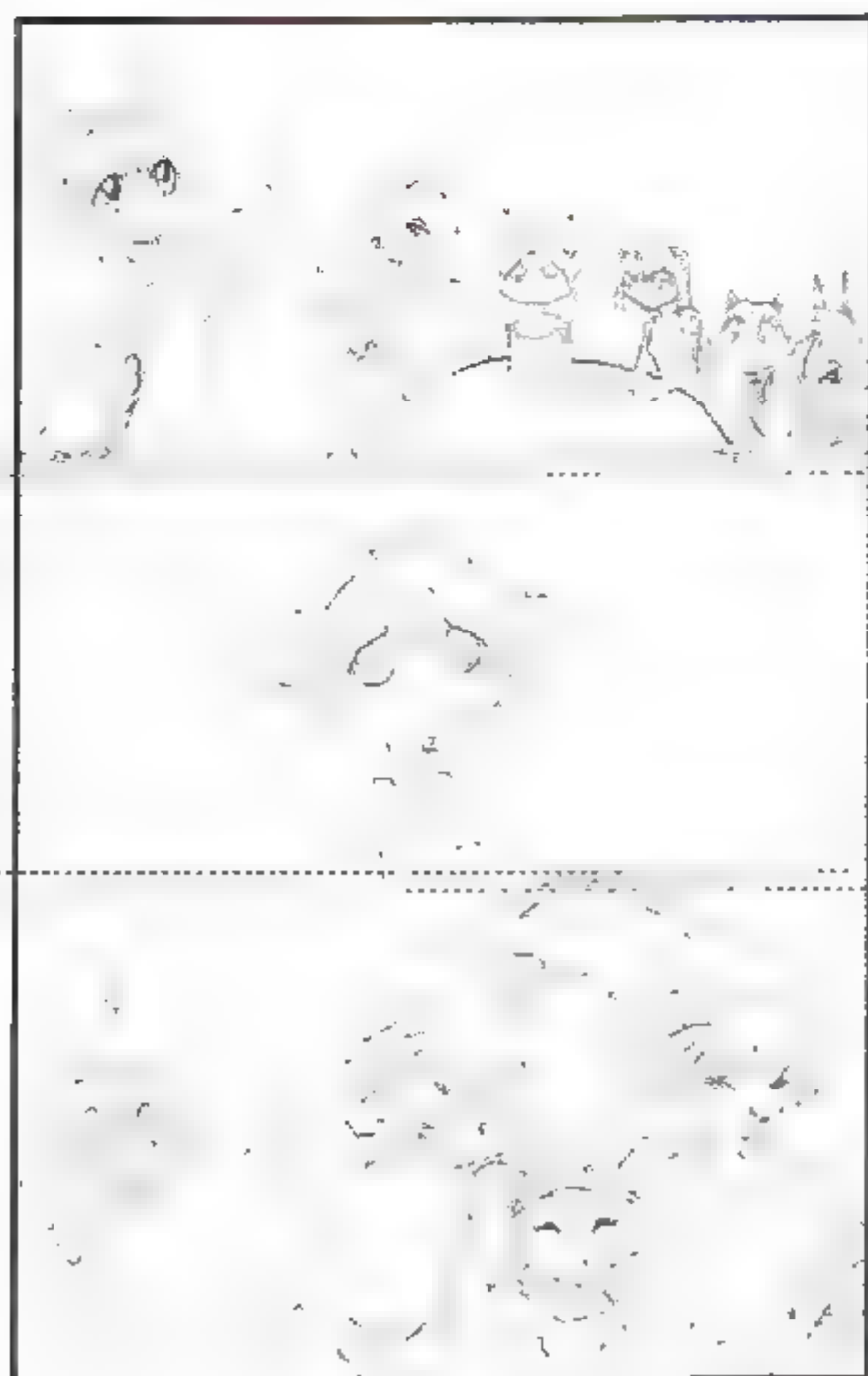


BORDER APPLIED

## BUILDING THE BORDERS

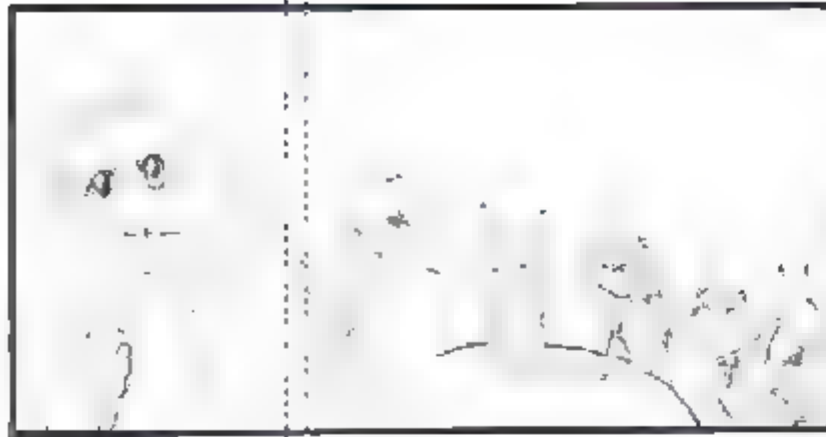
Now for some fun stuff. You can actually easily add to, or subtract from the borders, simply by painting in or drawing more, on the layer.

Simply select the region you wish to create a gutter or border for, and then flood fill with your color again. The layer style will automatically create the borders, by outlining the selection. It works in any direction.



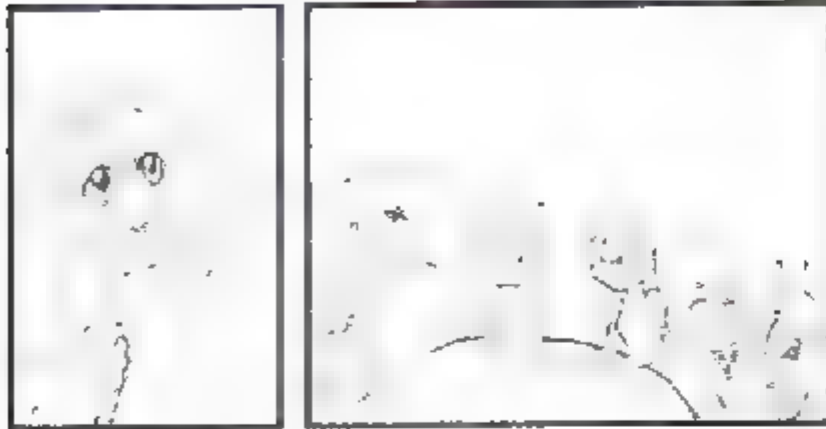
ADDING TO THE LAYER WITH THE PAINT BUCKET OR BRUSH CREATES THE GUTTERS





Now, if you find that you need a little bit more control over something, you can simply reduce the opacity of the layer. This will leave the borders in place, but will make the white matting semitransparent, so you can see the lines beneath. This can be very useful for fine tuning your borders.

This trick will also work in reverse, as well. You can fill in a large section of the page, and then make a selection, and “delete” the selection, essentially creating a punch out of the shape you want.



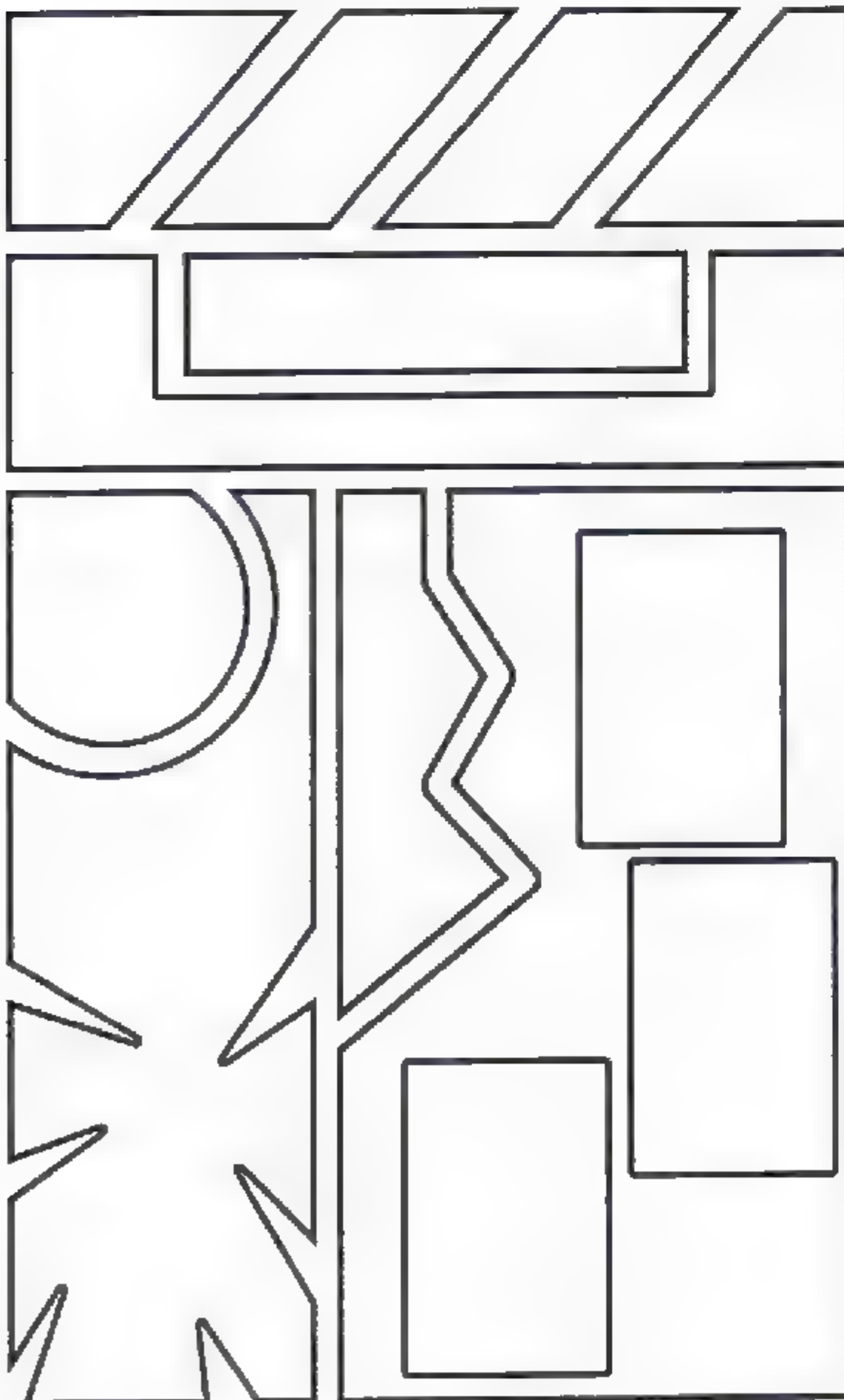
SELECT, AND FILL THE AREAS TO BUILD YOUR BORDERS

You can literally draw in any shapes that you want. For a less static feel you can brush the borders and gutters into place.

It can also be helpful to use multiple layers, and build your border out of different shape selections. Remember, if you accidentally add too much, (or too little) you can easily add or remove more from the borders.



DRAW ANY KIND OF BORDER YOU WANT, THE STYLE WILL DO THE REST



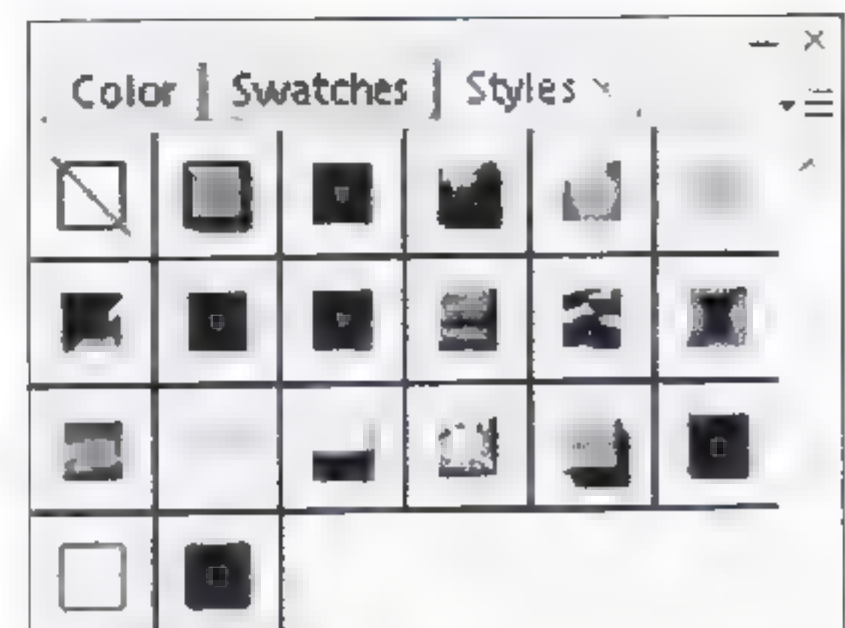
THERE'S NO LIMITATION ON THE SHAPES YOU CAN CREATE

You can also save your layer style, by opening up the “Styles” pallet window, and adding the style to the list.

To do so, make sure your Borders layer is selected, and then simply click anywhere in the empty space, inside the “Styles” pallet window. A new icon will appear, and that's it.

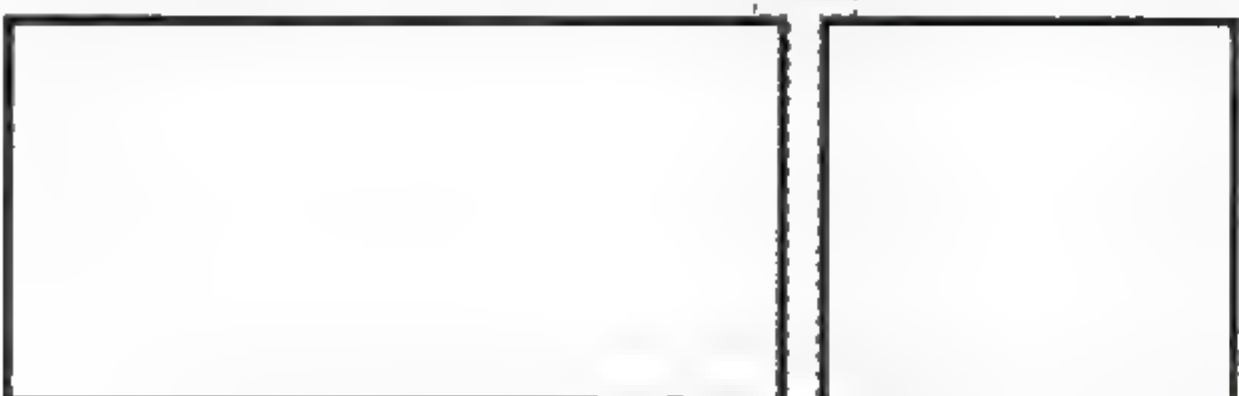
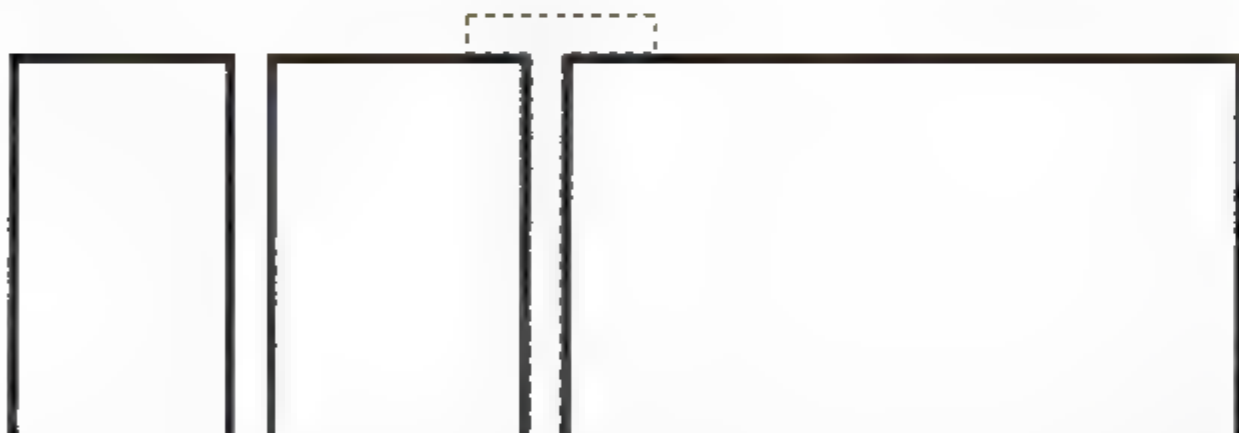
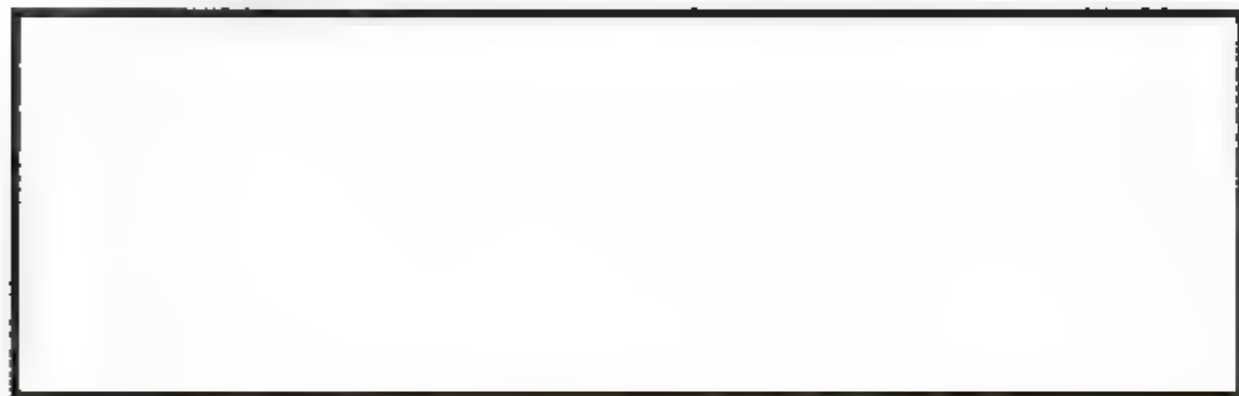
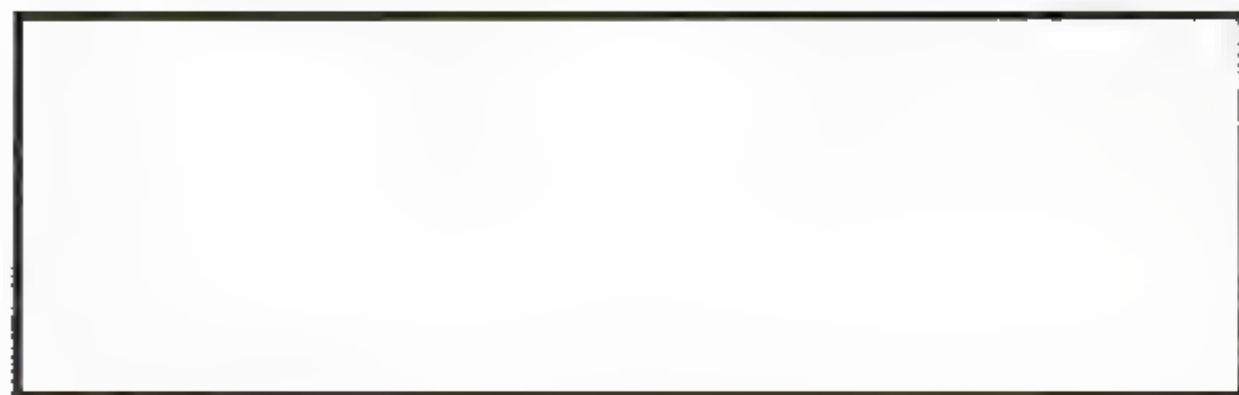
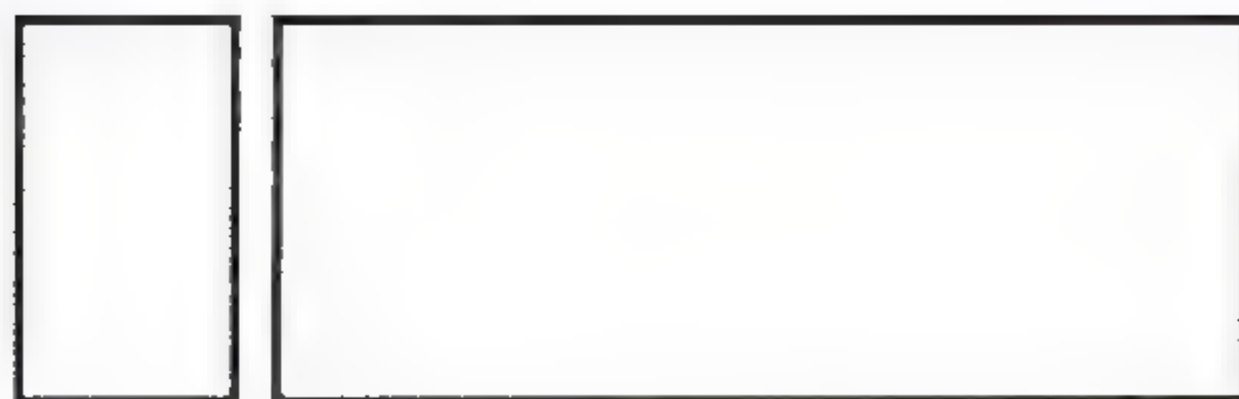
You can use the new style on future pages, by creating a layer for the borders, and then clicking on the new icon you created in the “Styles” pallet window. The border will be applied automatically.

This can be a big time saver in doing multiple pages.





## MAKING IT FASTER



Another time saving feature is the fact that you can select, copy, and drag sections, to recreate lines easily.

For example, if you have a border line that you like, you can make a selection around it, and copy it over several times.

Simply make your selection, then hold down the "Alt" button.

While holding the "Alt" button, click and drag inside the selection, to duplicate it. If you hold down "Alt" and "Shift" at the same time, it will make the selection adhere to the horizontal, or vertical axis in a straight line.



USING THIS TECHNIQUE CAN SAVE A LOT OF TIME, AND HARD WORK IN CREATING CLEAN AND PRECISE BORDERS

Just remember, there is no right or wrong way to create comics. Experimentation with techniques you're shown, (or trying completely new ideas) can lead to interesting results, and often will help you learn quicker, easier ways to do things.

The less time you have to spend on one part, the more you can devote to another.

Until next time, keep creating.

Darren Mueller is a comic book writer, and graphic designer, with Ringtail Cafe Productions.

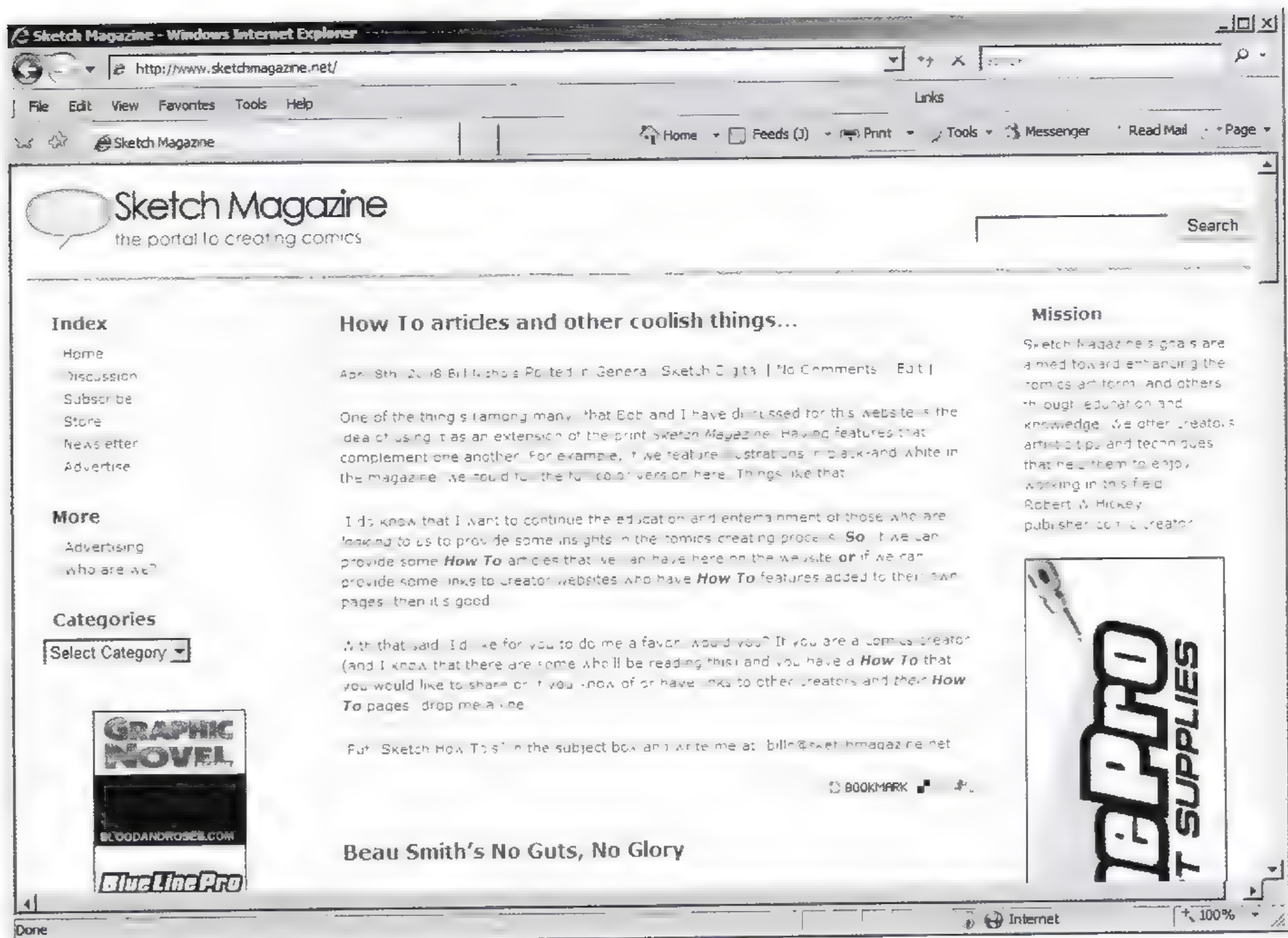
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# Inking a Commission Piece

## Inkblots

by Bob Almond

Greeting 'Blot buffs! Before we jump into this issue's latest entry I wanted to remind and update folks about the return of The Inkwell Awards for our 2009 sophomore year. This time we're back stronger and better than ever with a revised ballot of categories. The nominees on them will be voted by several independent sources, our Nominators, from throughout the comic book community. From there the IA Committee will tally and narrow down the candidates, all in an effort to make the process as fair as possible. While our first year's categories dealt with career retrospective themes, this and subsequent ones will follow the traditional model of other awards event organizations with favorite choices from works from the previous year, in this case 2008. Between all that and new committee members Bob Shaw and Dave Simons along for the ride, please join us in continued support by being connected through our site at <http://www.inkwellawards.com>. The new ballot and nominees will be posted later this spring and voting will take place the entire month of June ending June 30th.

Thanks for the plug opportunity and now we return you back to the scheduled ink-centric show!



Time for more visuals and less gab this time around, spatter-fiends. This issue we'll look at a blueline commission I did two years ago for client Hitoshi Amano.

The first image shows a pencil sketch that Terry Dodson did of Catwoman. While not very detailed, Terry had included all the relevant data that I would need to ink it minus the leather texture of her outfit that the character would be normally seen with. So, while this wouldn't be classified as a *loose layout*, it also isn't what I'd classify as *tight pencils*. So some 'finishing' will be necessary.

The client emailed me a high-resolution grayscale file of the pencils because he preferred that I ink the image on a separate board instead of inking the original art. That way he could retain both the Terry pencil art and my ink



art. I've learned that there are various methods to convert a file to bluelines but I will describe here a procedure I picked up from Bob McLeod on Yahoo's The Inkwell mailing list. (I have a Mac so keep in mind that there may be variations if using a PC.)

After opening the file in Photoshop, I click 'Image' on the browser and go to 'Mode'. The file is in grayscale. I change it to RGB color. I then hit 'Command U'. A window pops up for Hue/ Saturation adjustments. Make sure to check the Colorize option. I change the hue to blue at about 200; I raise the intensity to about 70, and the lightness up to 70-75.





The last adjustment is a personal preference. The settings only work in increments of five. Higher numbers are lighter, lower numbers obviously darker. It depends on how much clarity you want on the page in blue and how much of that you may want to possibly show up on the inked page upon completion. If you want, you can set it for 60 or 65. It won't matter if you scan the inked image later in bitmap but it may if scanned in grayscale, as some of the blues may show. If necessary, as an extra security, before converting to blueline you can print up the grayscale file and tape it onto the drawing board as reference next to the blueline version.

At this point you are ready to print the blueline image onto board. I use

2-ply, pre-ruled, smooth Strathmore boards. You need a large inkjet printer that will take this 11 X 17 medium. Until recently I've used an Epson Stylus Photo 1280 but after a few years it died on me, so I just picked up an Epson Stylus Photo 1400. I like these because not only are they reasonably affordable (@ \$300) but they take the thick board fine. I can use sizes up to 13X19 which I have for large color prints. After setting in Photoshop the Page Setup you can go to Print and Print settings to set the medium, color, and mode with quality options, which I set high. Then print away!

Now that we have the blueline image, I'll need to deal with finishing it. This means an inker is required to literally finish the rendering of the art, whether it be finer details, enhancing anatomy and shapes, light sources, shadows, etc. Some artists can do this while they ink. Me, not so much. I then elaborate and draw in further details and the leather textures in pencil as seen in image two.

From there I pull out my inkwell and go to work. I frame in all the blackened areas with markers and pull out my templates for the elliptical shapes like the zipper handle, eyes, goggles, and whip handle end. I use a straight-edge for the background box shape and a french curve for her whip/belt buckle. I subsequently pull out a brush to do the contour lines and others, adding in more details and establishing line weights. I also achieve the dry brush textural effect at the same time. Next, I use my Micron and Pitt markers for all final inking details that I find easier to use in these areas than brush.

Lastly, with Pro-white I do corrections and further textural touch-ups. And I add a zip-a-tone screen as a design element in the background box that was originally filled in with pink marker (as were the lips) in the pencil file. If the client was fond of the colored areas I could have attempted to convert the piece to 'pinkline' as the specific color doesn't matter with the scanning, but he wasn't.

And there you go, my ink brethren, a finished commission!

Sketch

# YOU NEED TO START IN BLACK AND WHITE

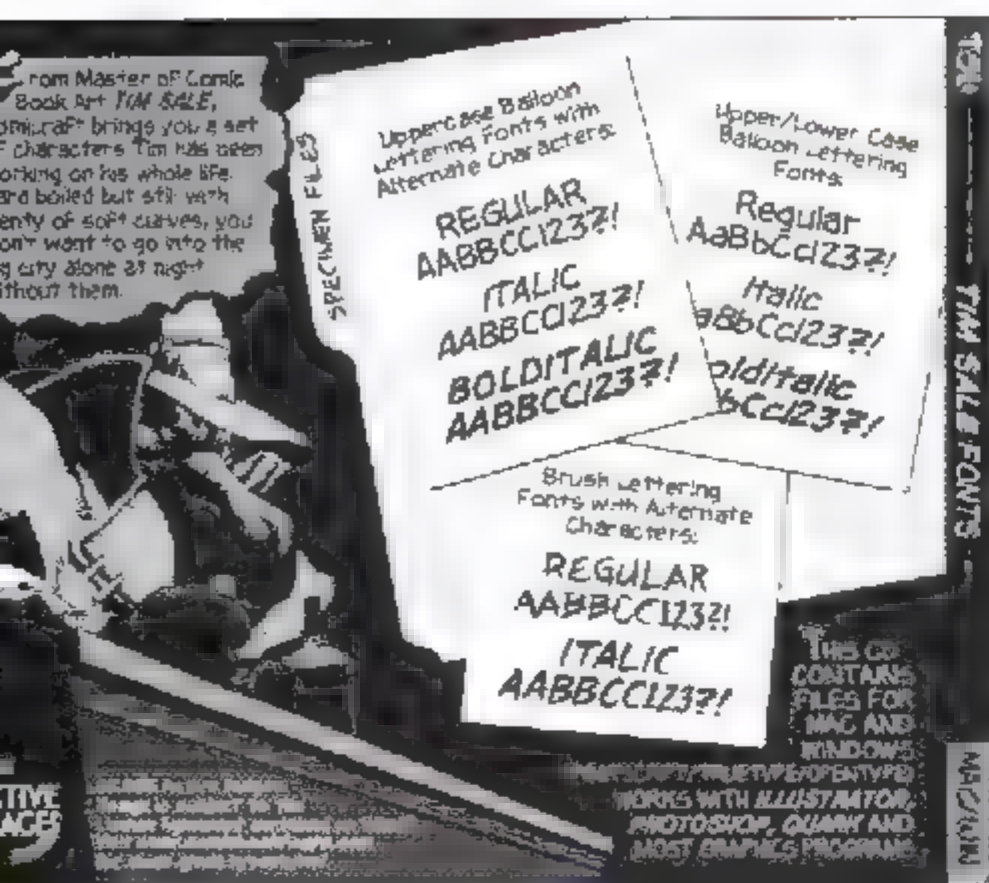
## INKS AND WHITE OUT



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# LETTERING FONTS



## On the Bookcase...

by Bill Nichols

### Mythology: The DC Comics Art of Alex Ross

by Chip Kidd and Geoff Spear

Pantheon Books

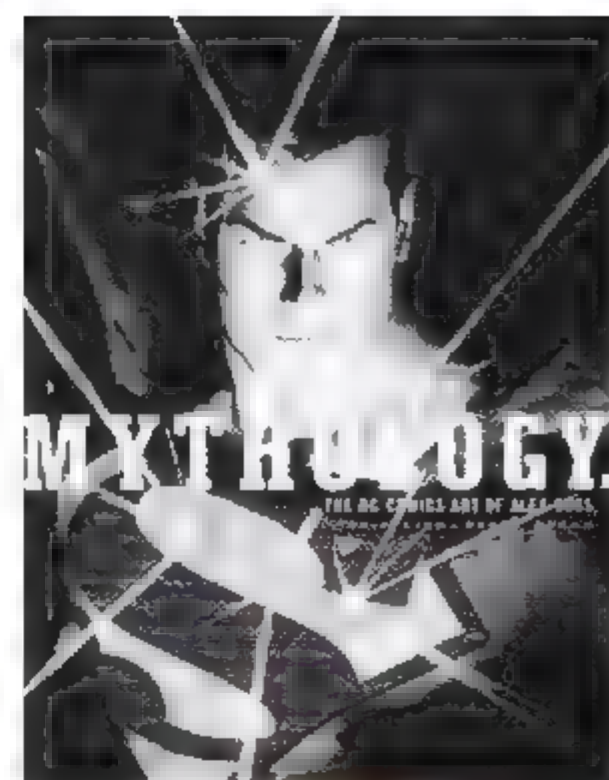
\$24.95 sc

Let's face it: Alex Ross does some beautiful work, simply phenomenal. His paintings and painted pages are wondrous to behold and I look forward to seeing any project he gets involved with.

This book shows Ross' process of creating some of his work on the DC characters such as Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and others. Many, many others. As well as some glimpses into his beginnings as an artist, something I'm always interested in myself.

Whether it's an original piece or a recreation of some classic cover, we get to see examples of Ross' treatments of the characters as well as his take on other types of drawing and animation styles.

Get it.



### Kirby: King of Comics

by Mark Evanier

Abrams

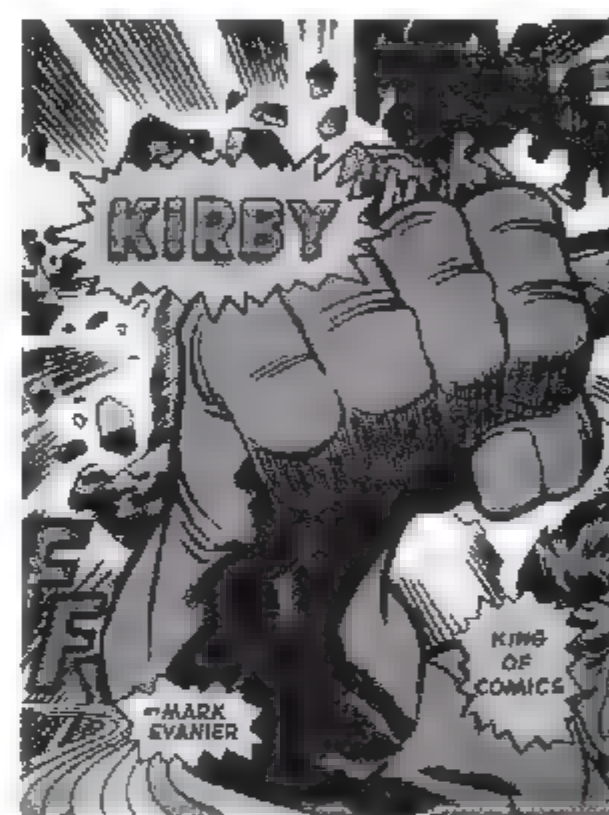
\$40.00 hc

When I was growing up, I took Jack Kirby for granted. When I was really into comics later, I started to get it, although I still tended to take him and his mega-contributions to comics for granted. And now, I really do get it! This book by Mark Evanier that looks at the length and breadth of Jack Kirby's life as told by Evanier, a longtime assistant and a major comics writer himself.

There is a great deal of information here that I just plain didn't know about Jack Kirby. I loved this look at the man and the many different things he tackled throughout his career.

And Mark's epilogue, a story about Jack, really got to me.

I recommend it for the Kirby philes out there, as well as others who might benefit from seeing the man who has influenced so much in comics as well as so many creators.



### Workshop of Filthy Creation: The Art of Johnny Ace and Kali Verra

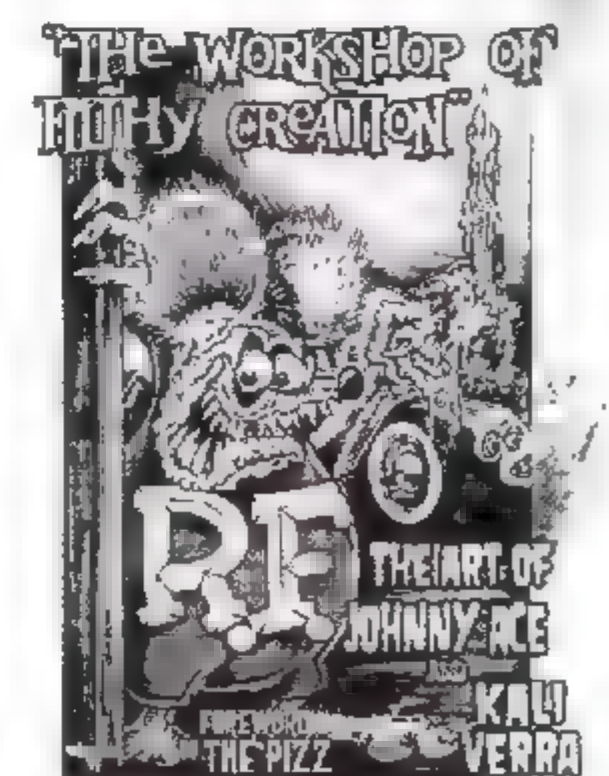
Dark Horse Comics

\$19.95 hc

I remember Ratfink and other things from the studios and creativity of Ed "Big Daddy" Roth from my childhood and while I liked it okay, it just really didn't do much for me. Let's face it: I liked superheroes and such.

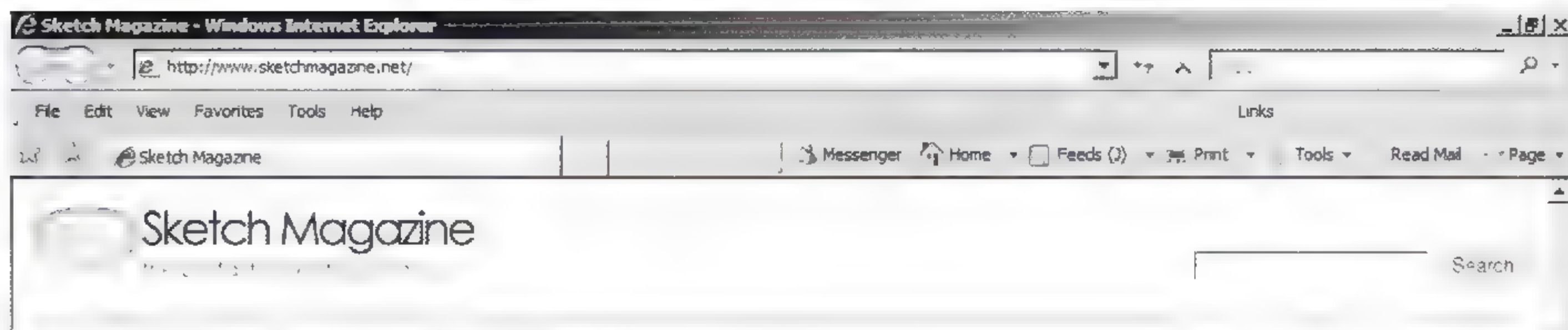
Since those days, I've gotten my horizons expanded on a great many fronts and in this book. I saw a lot of artwork that I've seen in the intermittent years. And I just didn't realize that it was Johnny Ace.

The book is chockfull of tattoos, cars, pinstriping and Kali Verra, Johnny's studio and creative partner. It's an interesting book to absorb and you still want to go back and look some more.



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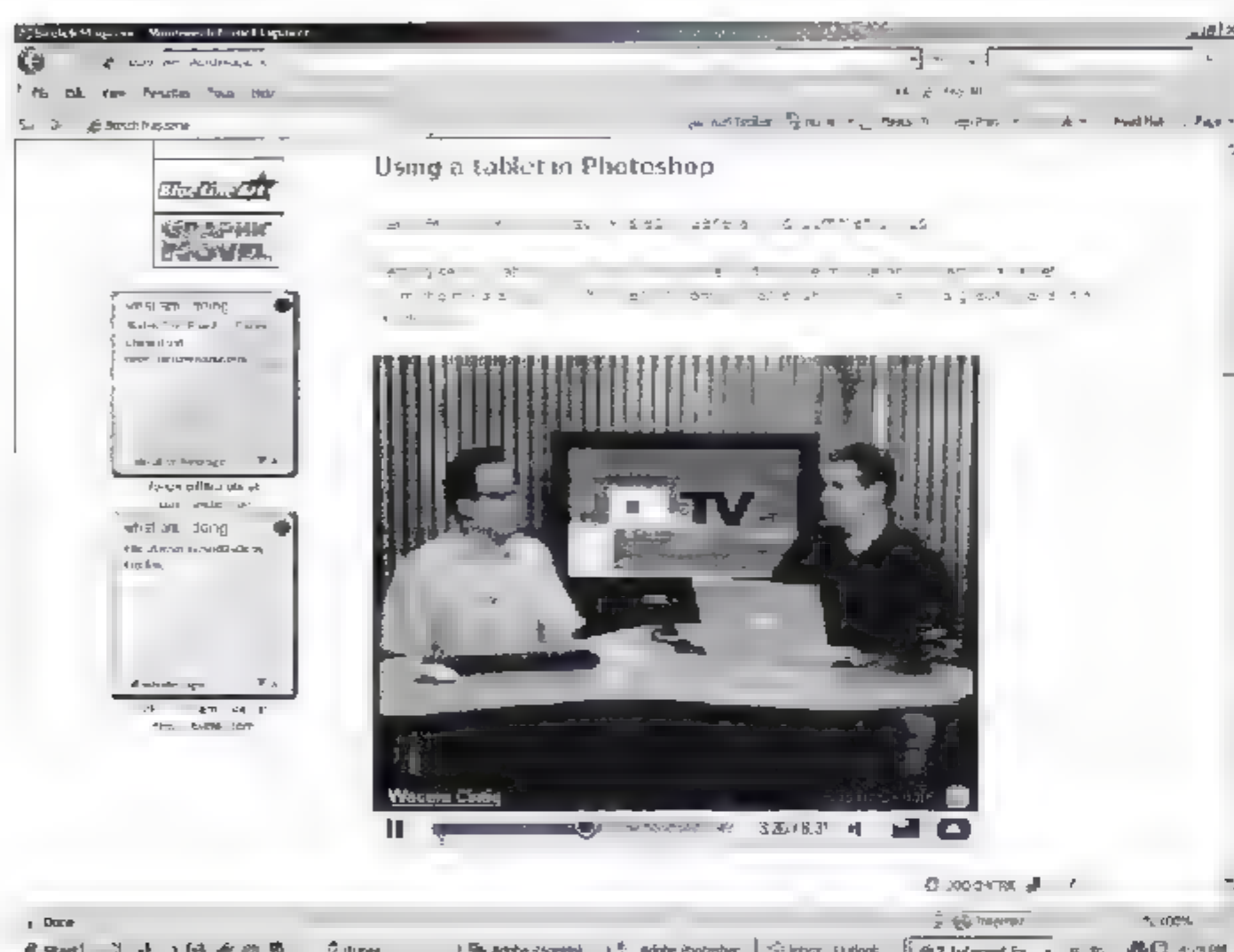




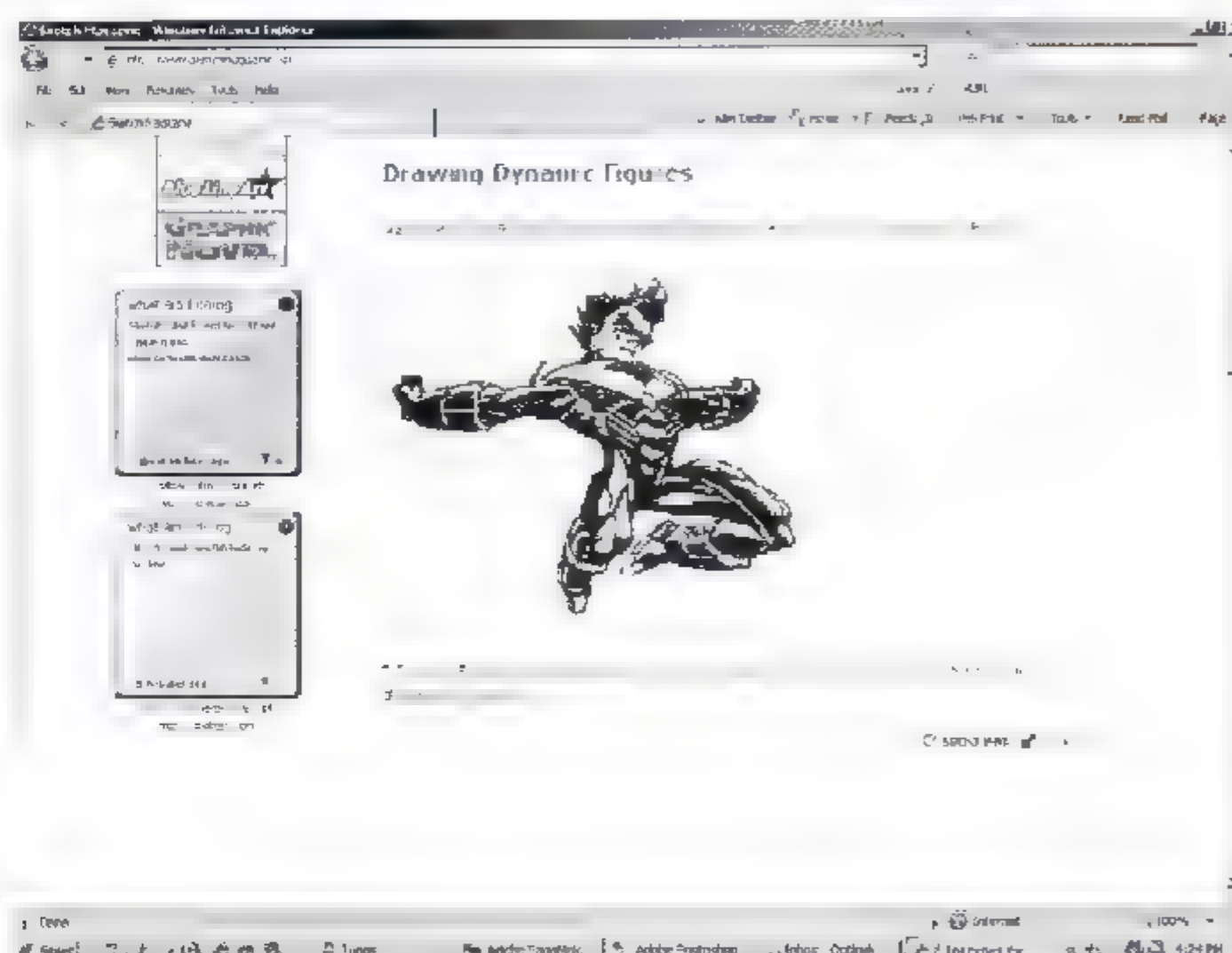
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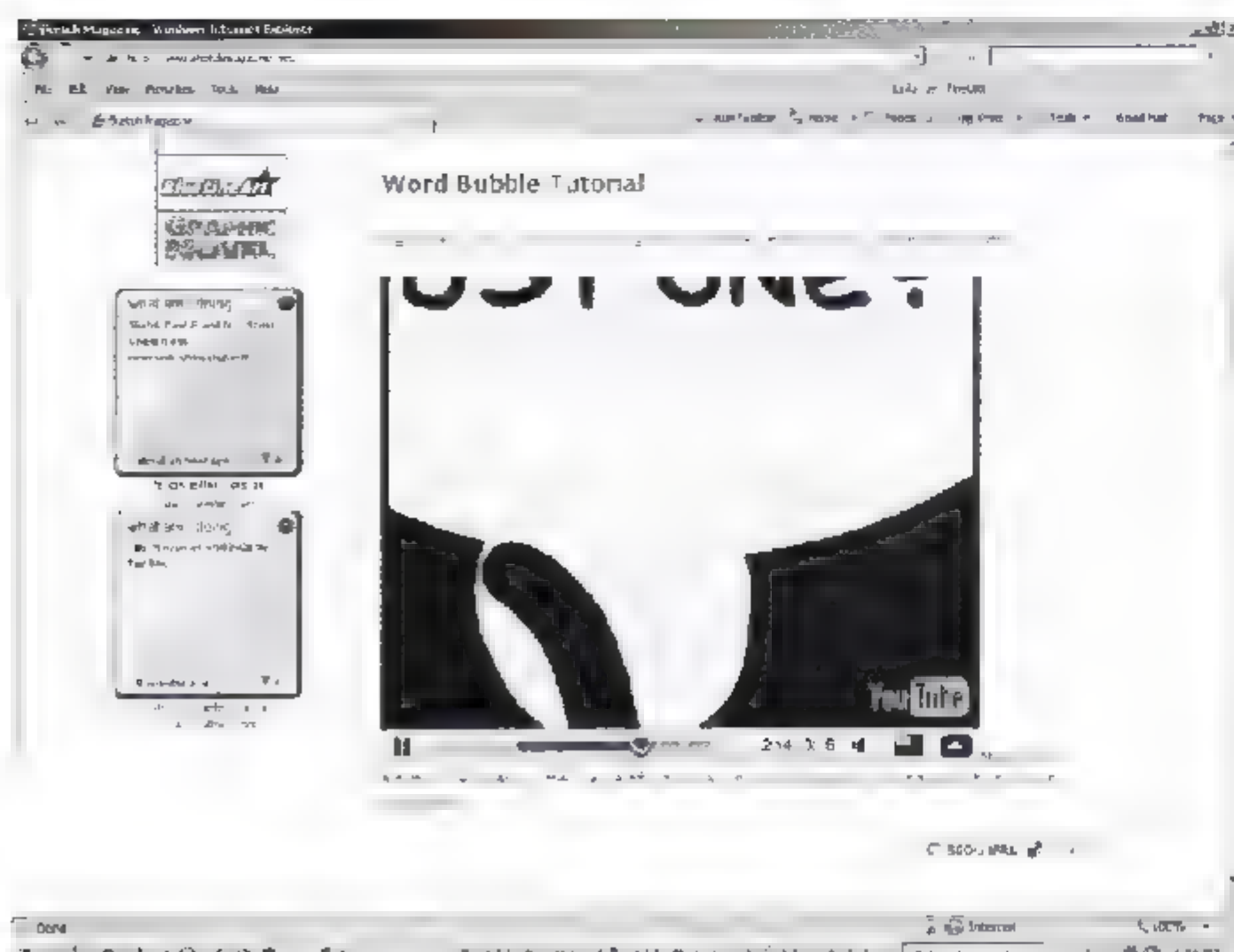
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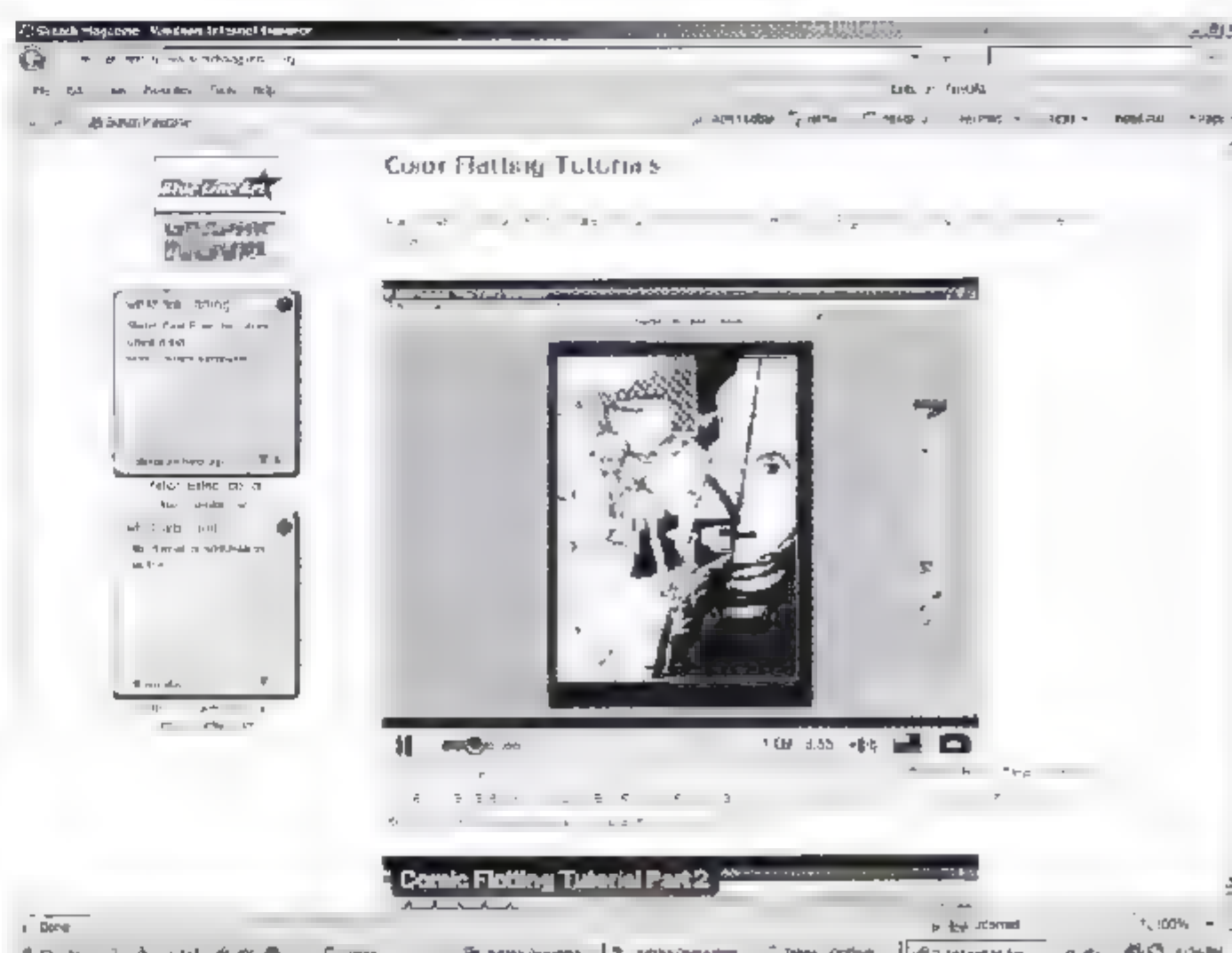
Using a Tablet in Photoshop Video from DL.TV



[www.scottmcdaniel.net](http://www.scottmcdaniel.net)



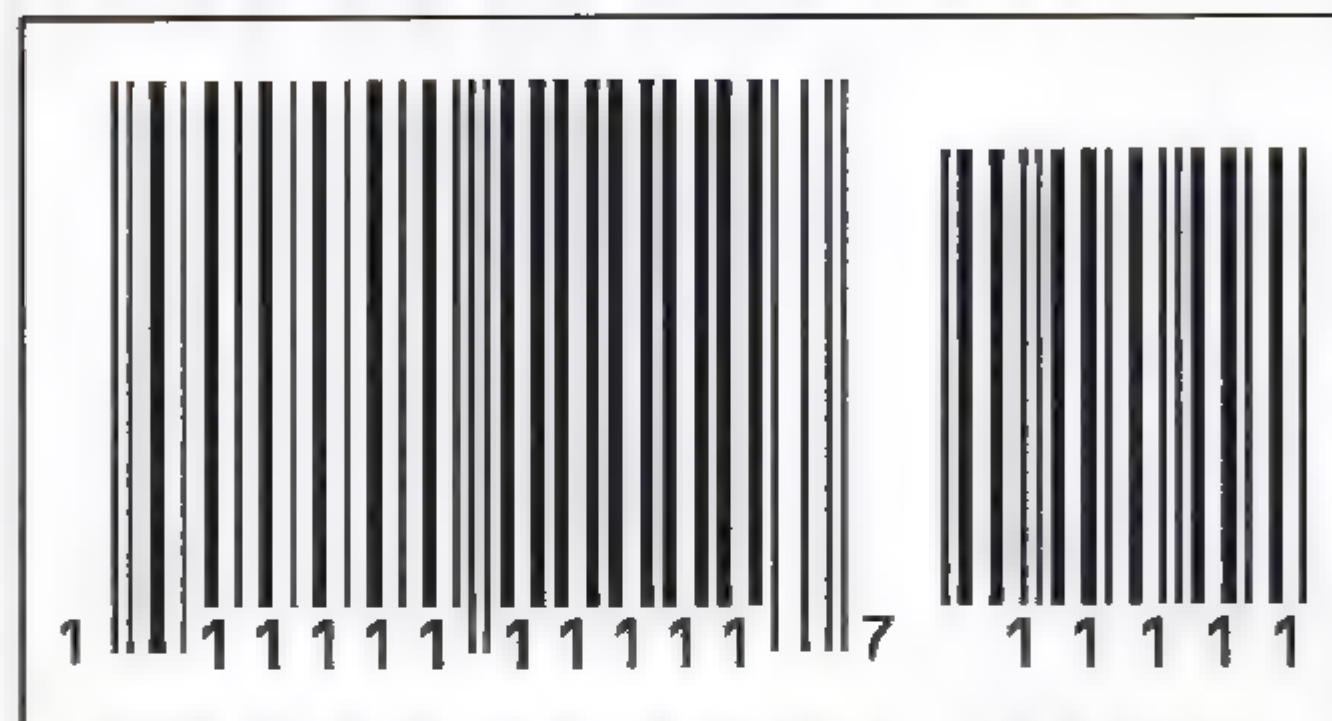
Word Bubble Tutorial Video by Matt White.



Color Flattening Tutorial by Lisa from Millicomics



# Need A Bar Code?

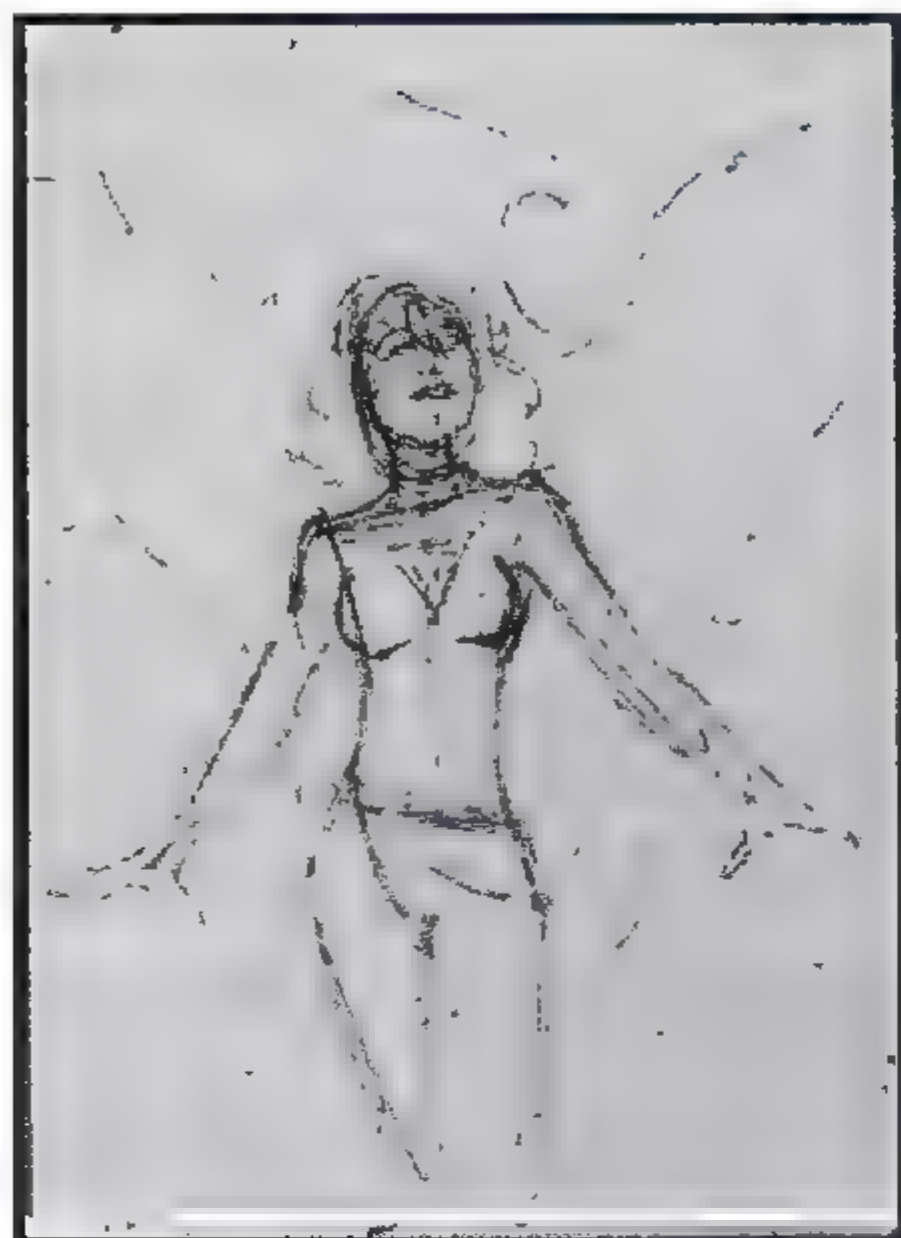


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# My Sketch Card Process

by Geo C.



Step 1

## Step 1

This involves a really light rough. Here I get a general idea for composition (placement of objects). This is basically a thought process at this point. I try to figure out what will work and what won't and I'll probably do 2 to 5 different idea roughs before choosing one I feel is best. This is probably, for me, the most important stage of making a sketch card

## Step 2

In this step I've gone back in darker and a lot tighter. At this point I can tell whether I can go on further or not. As I tighten up the image, I can conclude whether or not the card will be possible to be inked at this small a level. I've made many roughs that I thought were really cool looking but got to this stage and realized it wouldn't be possible to ink due to details being way too small.

The phoenix in the background is still a bit light because I tend not to ink background elements aside from buildings. I feel it gives more of a pop to



Step 2

the subject and I'll end up crasing the phoenix background element. For now it just keeps things in compositional perspective for me.



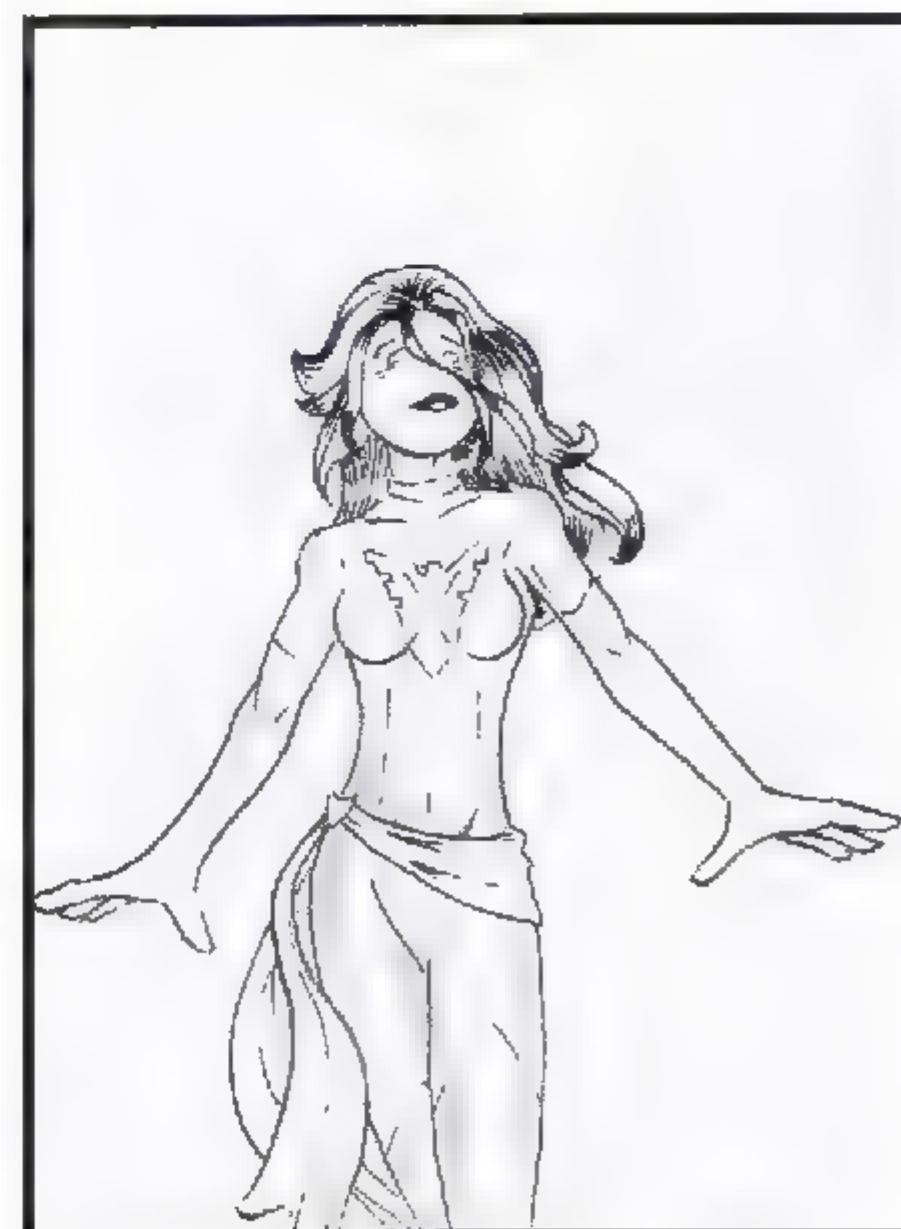
Step 3

## Step 3

This is the inking stage. Note the background element is basically gone. I crased it after the inking was complete. I try not to over-render shadows in ink, especially for female characters, and leave this to the coloring stage. I inked this with various sizes of Micron pens; they have a tendency not to spread as I color in the piece. India ink, though water-soluble, is not alcohol-soluble. In fact, I use alcohol to clean my India ink nibs. At this stage you're pretty much trying not to make a mistake because any type of white-out (acrylic paint, white ink etc) will not absorb color as well as the Bristol board.

## Step 4

Here I am just adding some darks to the hair and other areas. Sometimes I will use grey markers of various tones for an undertoning. I'll lay down light gray then quickly add darks where needed and blend them together with the initial light gray. If you're not sure how your tones in grey should be placed, I recommend using tracing paper and some pencilling in to figure out the right areas.



Step 4



# MARKERS



## DELETER



## PRISMACOLOR



## TOMBOW

## COPIC



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Step 5

### Step 5

This is the final step. Here I am basically coloring and I use a combination of Copic and Prismacolor markers (depending on what colors are available for each). This process has to be done quickly for proper blending, so I was not able to scan between color processes.

What I do is find a section that I can do relatively quick in case I feel a sneeze coming or something comes up in which I have to leave the table for a while. I then decide on the color scheme. Once that's decided I test the colors on a separate piece of Bristol board to make sure it'll go as planned. Then I proceed to lay down the lightest color first; this helps with blending.

After I have the light color laid down I quickly go back with either a dark or mid-tone color. I will use these to show depth. I then quickly go back over the light and dark sections with the original light color to blend the two or three tones I have. If done when the light color undercoat is wet enough a light and dark tone is all that is needed, as the blending will fill in the gradation from light to dark and vice versa.

Now I can look back on some areas and see where I need highlights. There are two approaches to this. You can either color around a white area on the board you have decided to block out for a highlight area or get a paint pen (found in scrapbooking sections of arts and crafts stores) and go back over the card adding the appropriate highlights, which is what I do. Although gradient colors add depth to the subject, I find adding highlights really makes a subject *pop*.

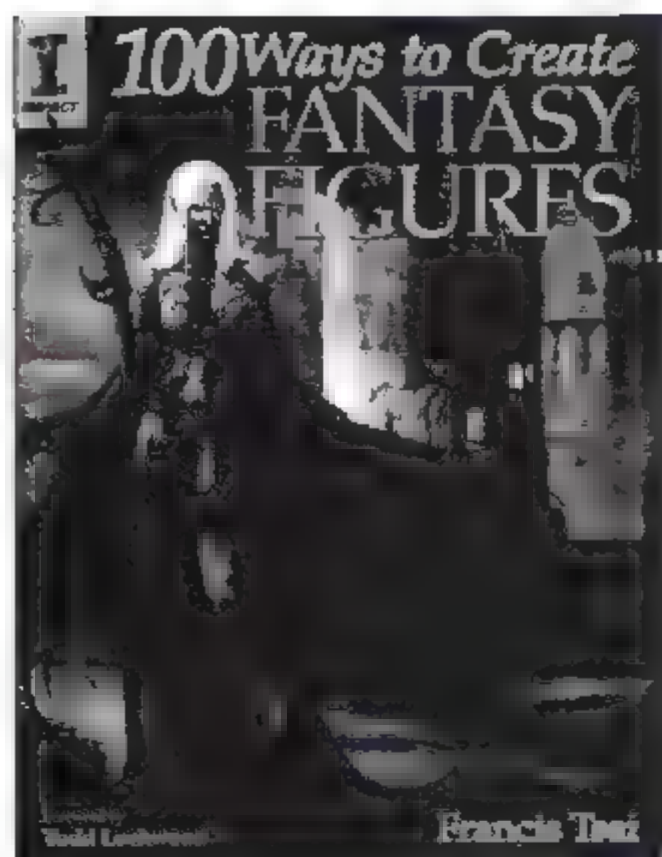
The background was the tricky part of this piece. At first, I was going to leave it all white with the white phoenix bird, but after doing it in color I wanted the black background. There would be just too much white if I hadn't done this. I then took a marker blender and went around the flames and the flame edges and started rubbing it in. This causes the colors to get a bit lighter but also a bit more blurred (similar to the Blur effect in Photoshop). It was an experiment at the time that I feel worked out well.

Then I went back in with the white paint pen and put in some stars.

Sketch



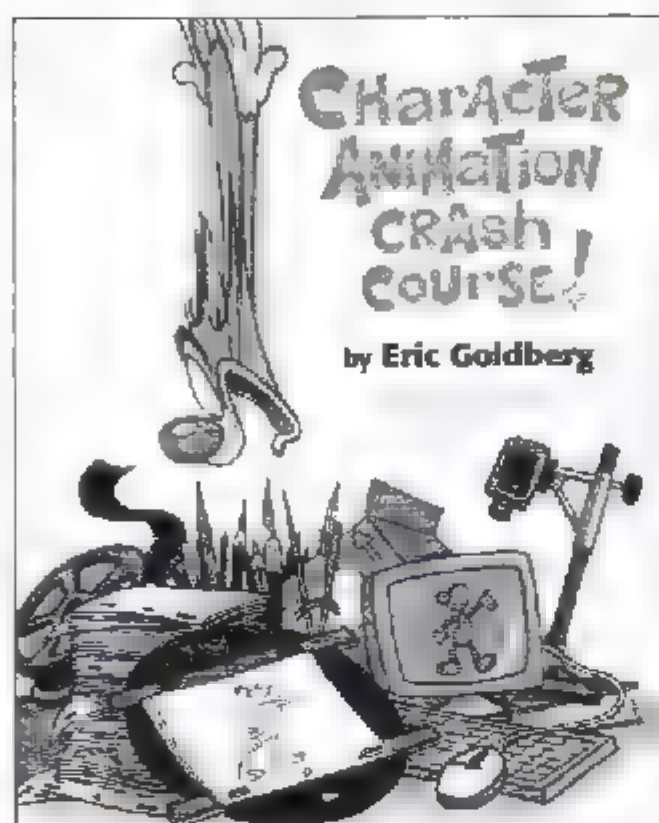
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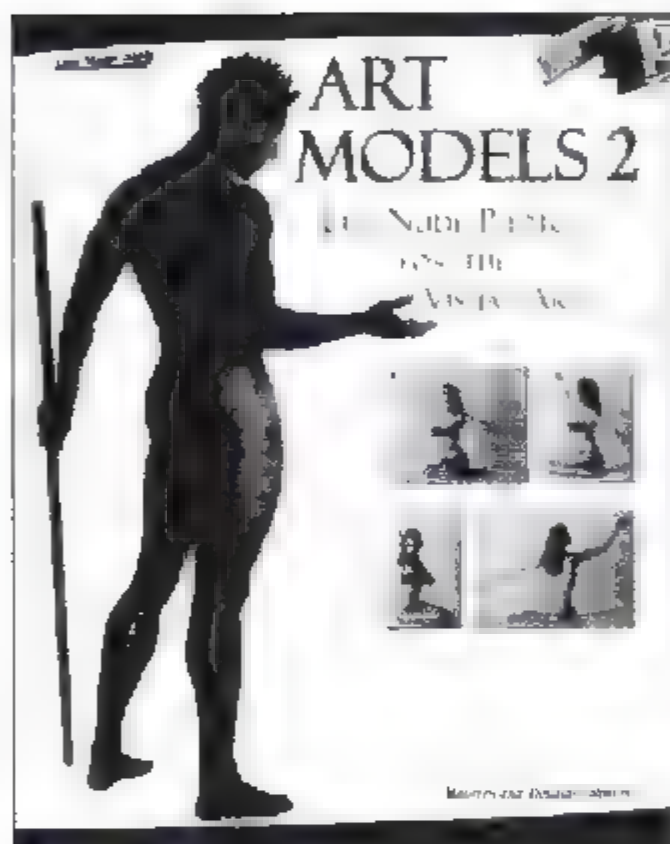
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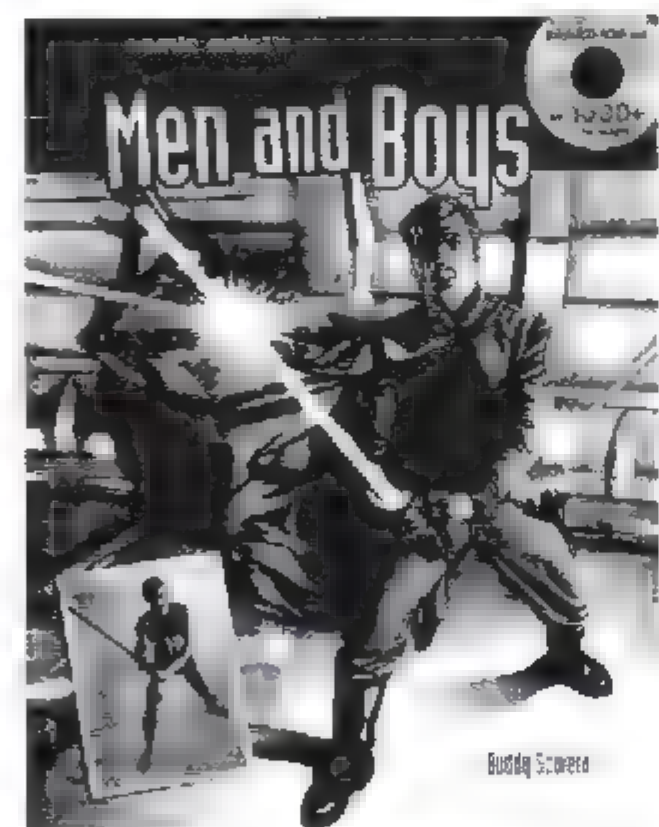
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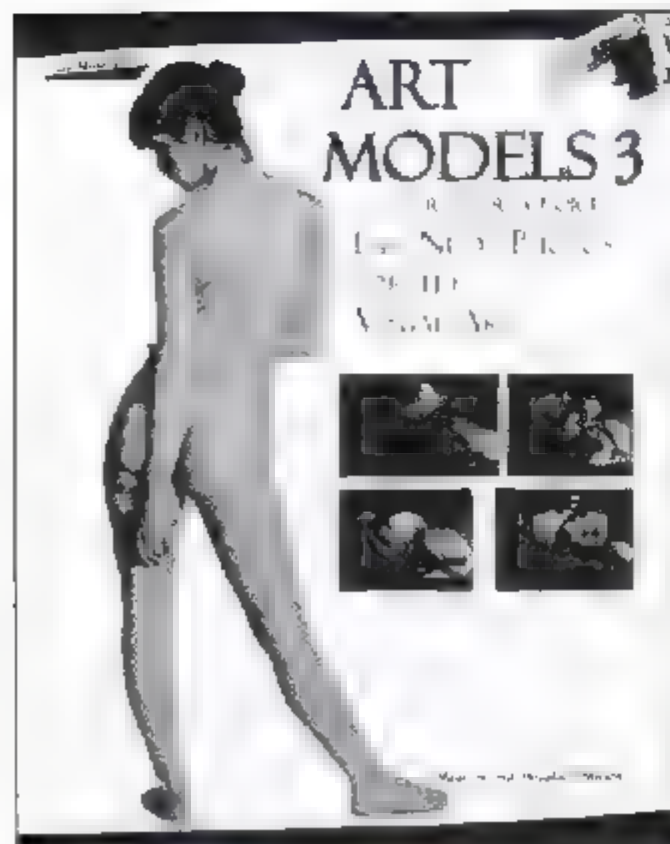
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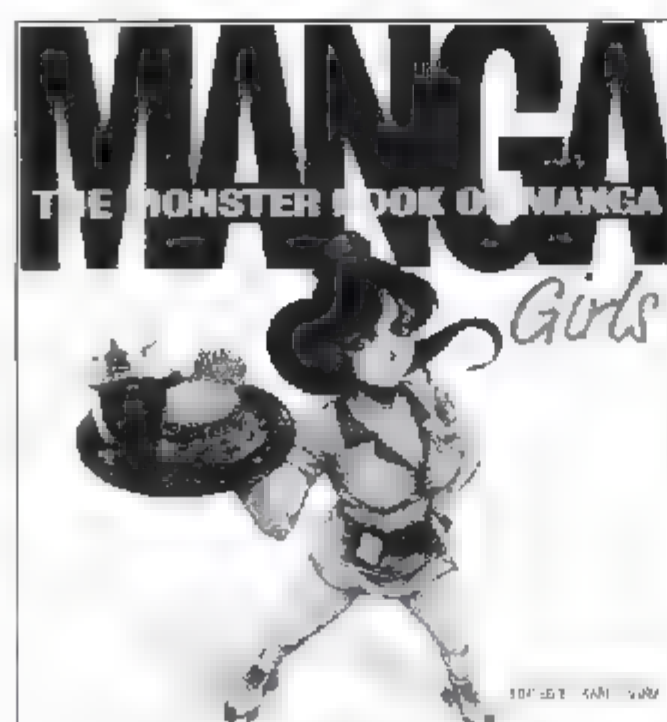
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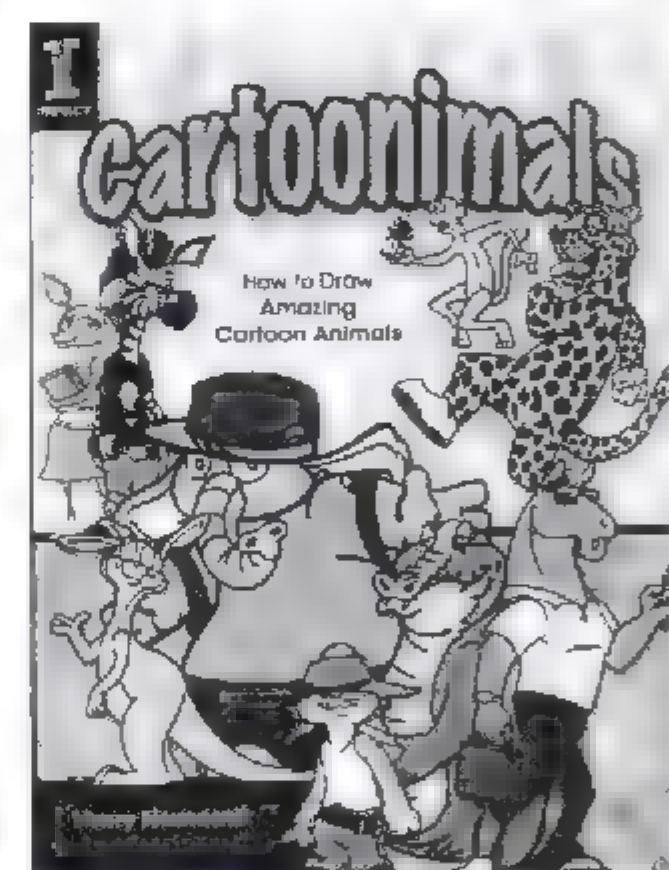
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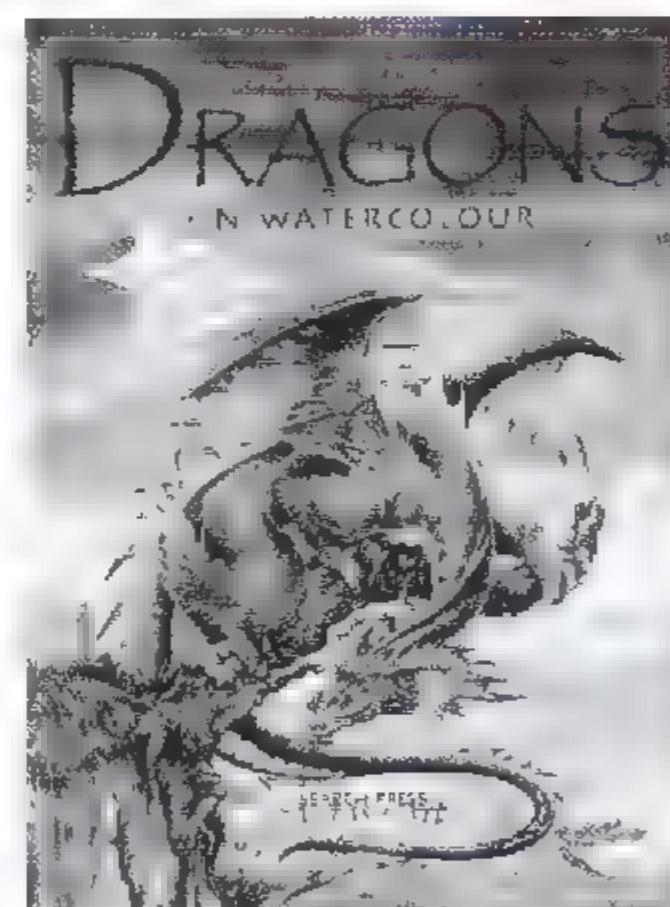
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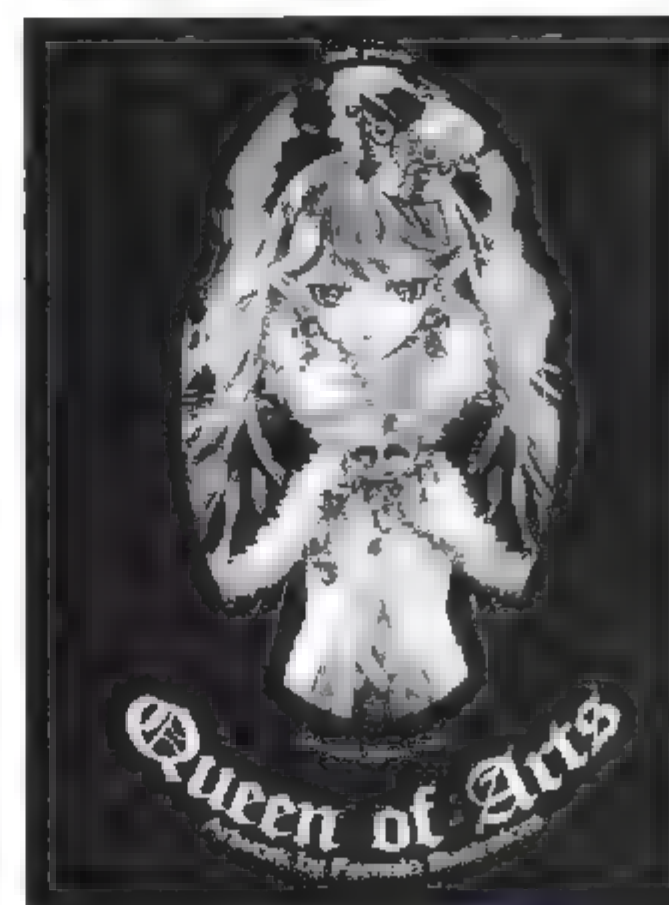
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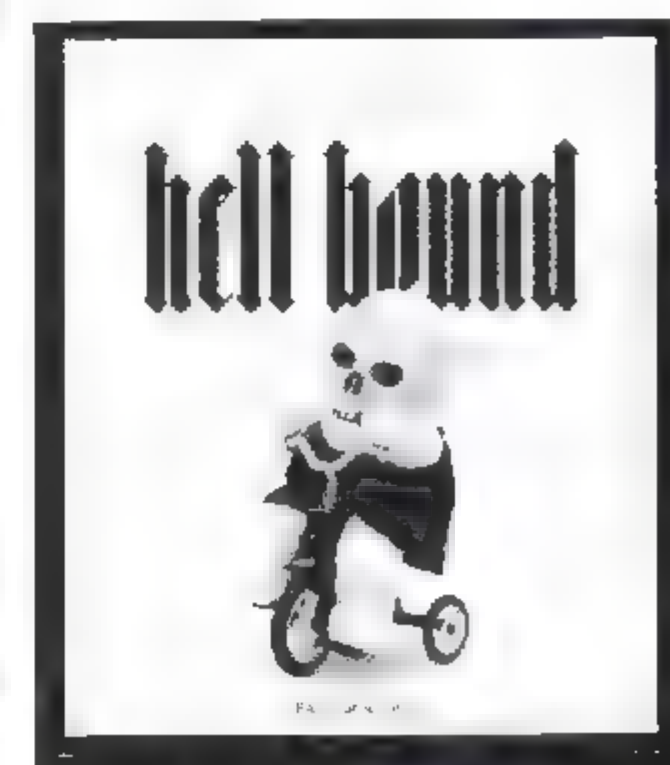
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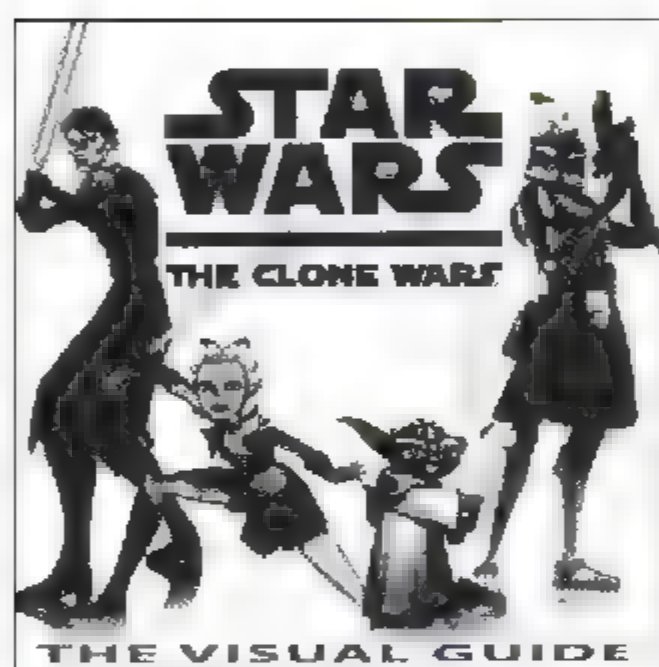


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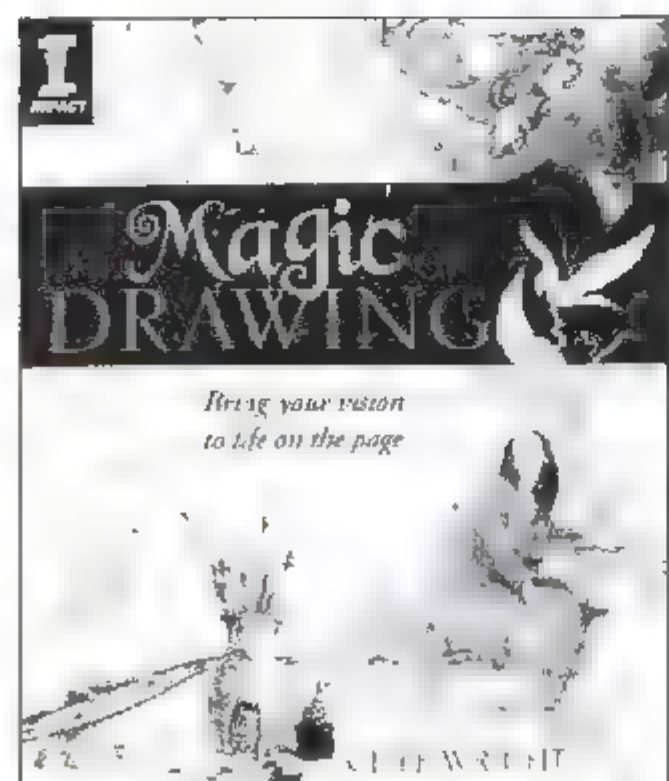


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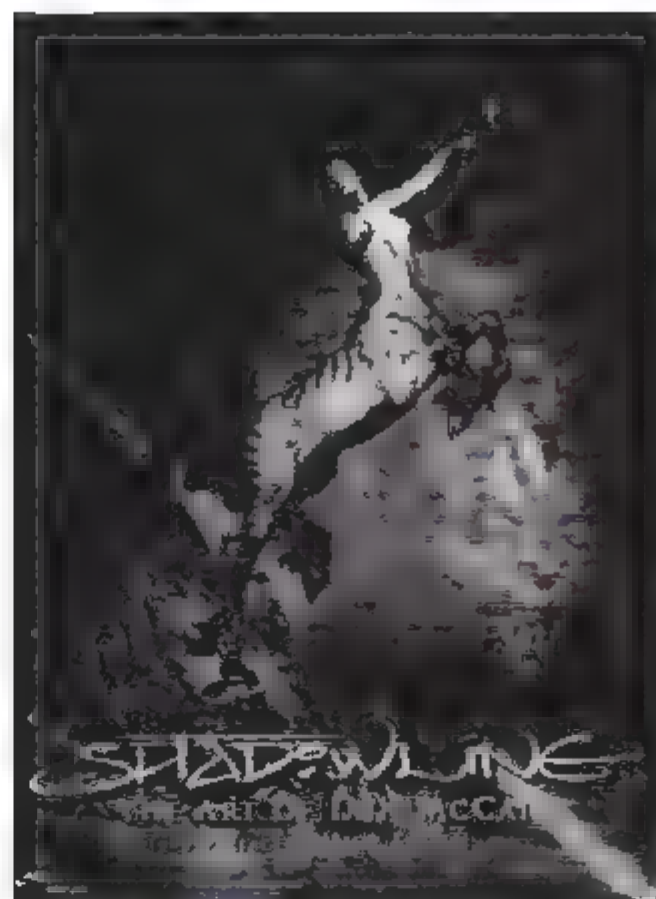


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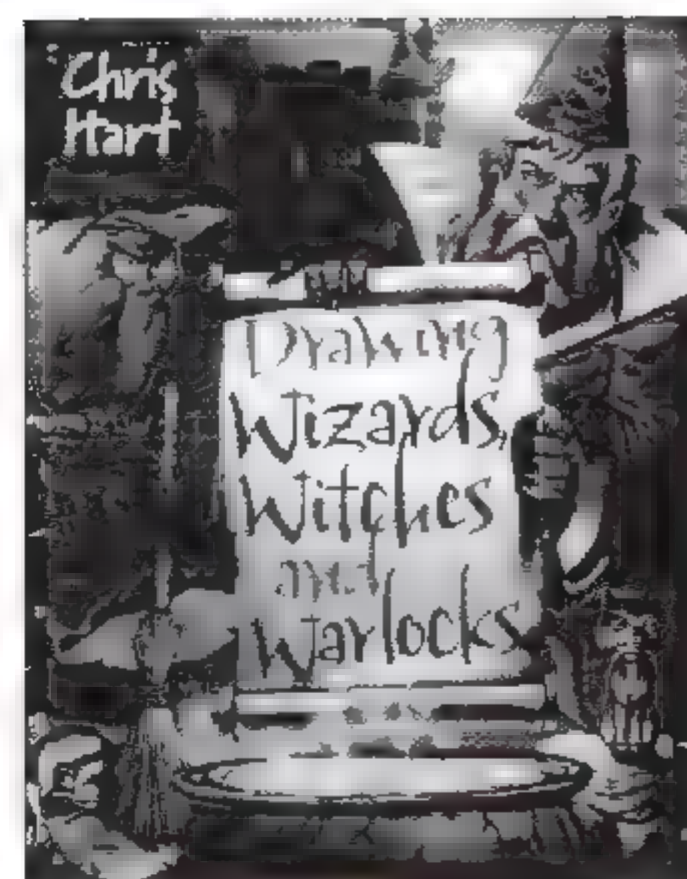
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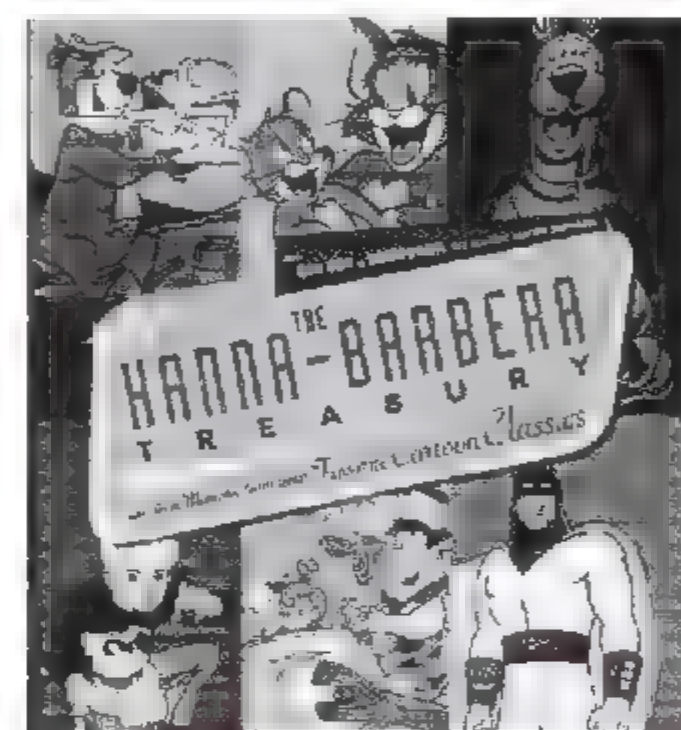
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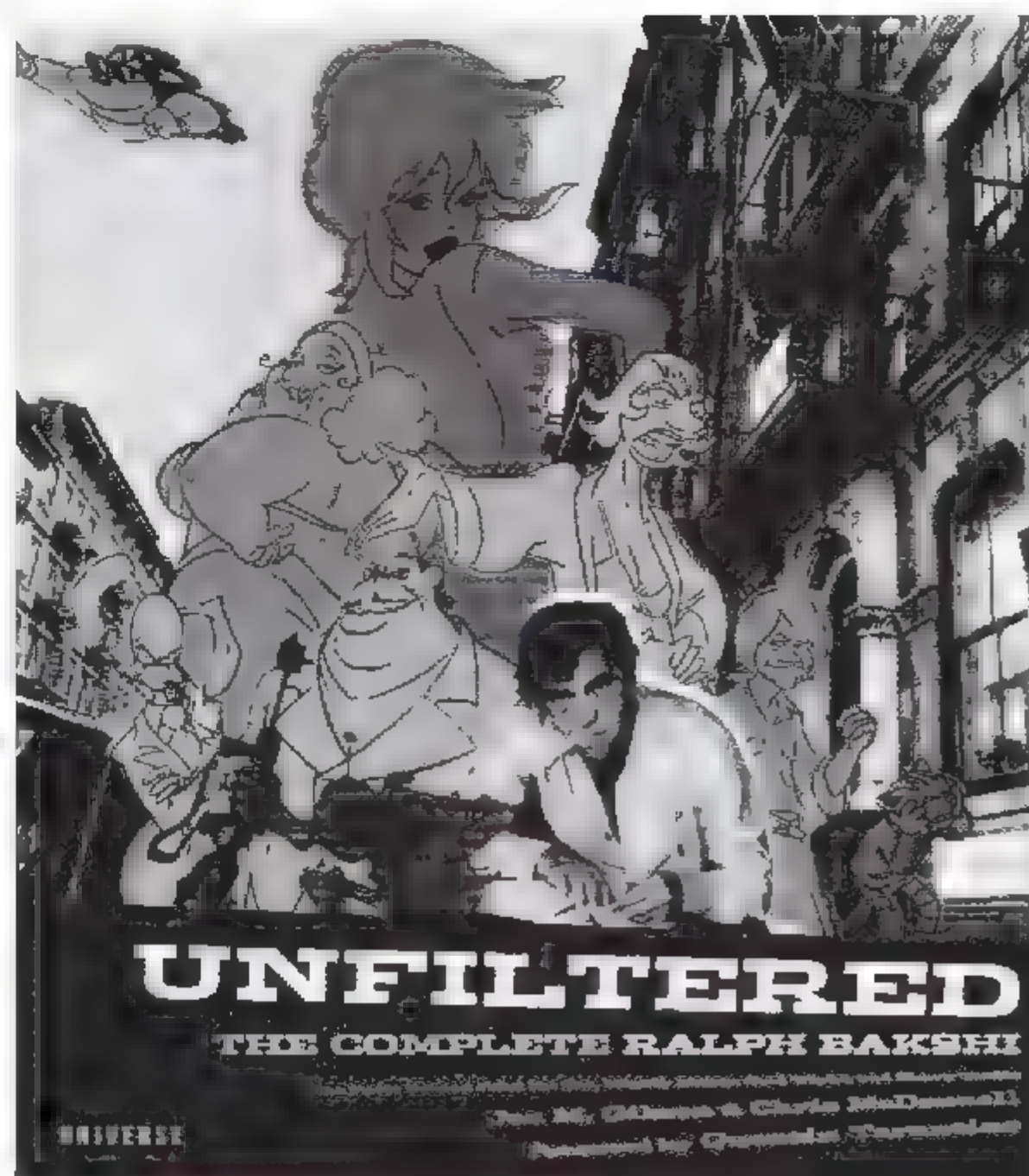
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“WOW!”

That's the first thing I thought when Bill Nichols e-mailed me asking if I'd be interested in writing an article. He wanted me to explain the process I go through to produce my art, be it sequentials, pin-ups, covers, whatever.

Then of course I thought, “Why me?” The only “major” project I'd done to date was *Xombie: Reanimated* through Devil's Due. I hadn't done anything for the “Big Two” (though of course I'd love to!) Turns out Bill had checked out my DeviantArt page and liked my work, and he *was* an editor, so that had to mean something. So, after getting some advice from my buddies online and figuring out what art to use, I said “Yes.”

That's how *you* ended up here, going on a trip through the mind of Nate Lovett as I complete a piece of comic art.

### 1. Thumbnails

The piece I've decided to show you the process on is what will hopefully be the cover to the second issue of *Carter Kain: Rocket Ranger*, this is an all-ages series that I'm working on with my good friend and collaborator Jeremy Dale, which we're shopping around to various publishers. It features Carter Kain, a kid dropped into the role of a galactic guardian. Jeremy is handling the writing duties on the book, so we first bounced some ideas back and forth as to what would be a good cover idea. After working up a few thumbnails, we decided on this one, containing the characters Carter Kain, Sarah Hammer, and a mysterious stranger to build up the drama (Figure A).

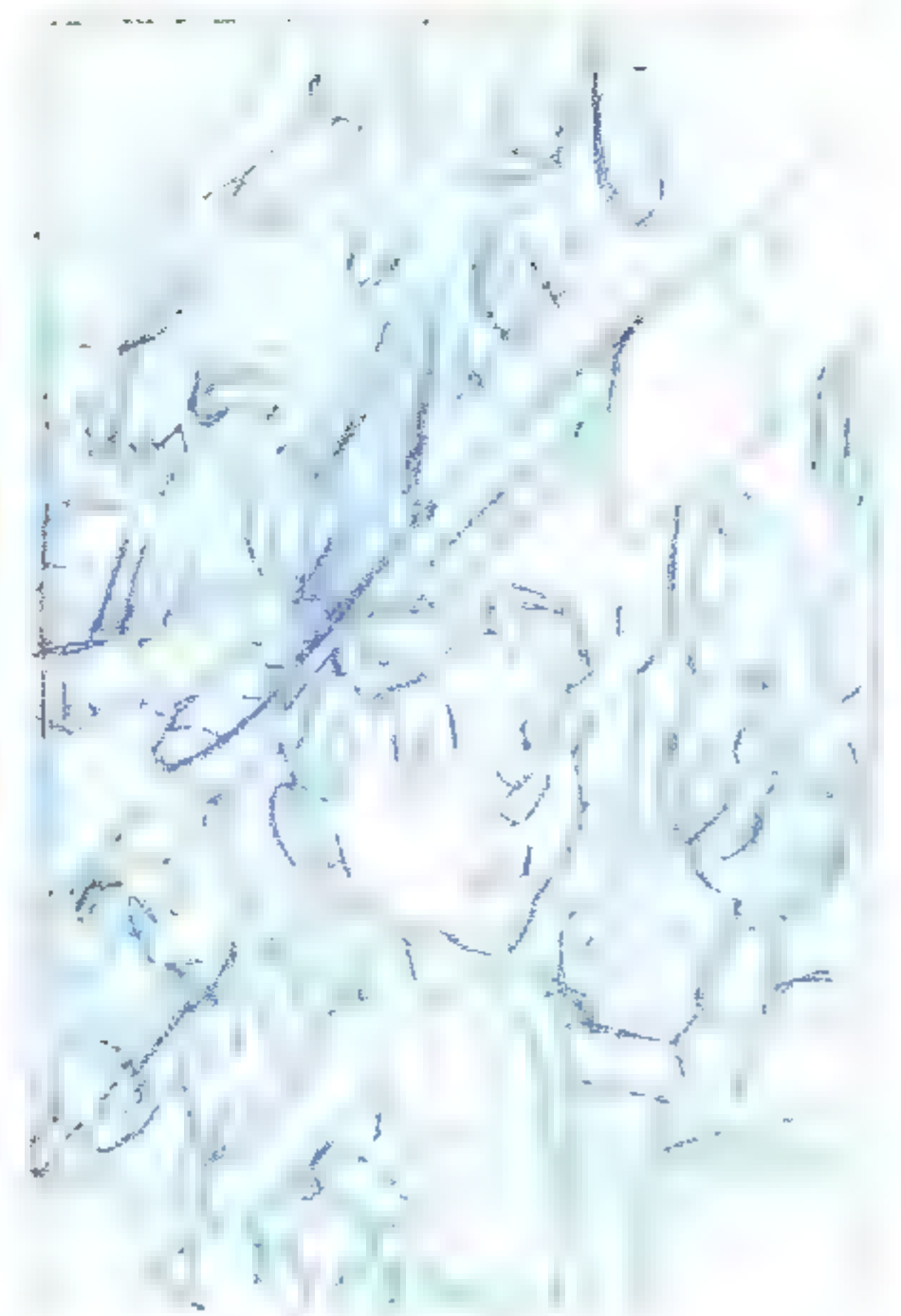


Fig. A





Fig. B



Fig. C

## 2. Roughs

Using the thumbnail as my starting point, I create a "rough." Now how I do my roughs varies depending on whether the project is a sequential page or cover/pin-up, but one thing always remains constant: I always do them full size (10"x15"). The biggest difference is that when I do a sequential page, I do it traditionally, pencil on paper. For covers/pin-ups, I tend to draw the characters out, sometimes individually (*Figure B*), and then scan them into Photoshop and composite them together there. I then add in a rough background, and print it off (*Figure C*).

From here I take the printout to my handy light table/art desk, and sketch my rough onto my board. I usually use Strathmore 300 smooth, using a lightbox and my mechanical pencil with non photo blue lead. I do this for two reasons: one, I like my finished pages to be extremely clean, so I prefer to keep my rough under drawings off the board. I tend to use a lot of lines when I'm laying things out and I find they can be a distraction on the finished board. Two, my printer isn't large enough for me to run the board through it, so I have to lightbox it on.

## 3. Pencils and Scans

Next I do my finished pencils. There isn't really much to go into here. I pretty much follow my rough, though sometimes I'll tweak a line here and there. For this I use a lead holder, with HB lead in it. (*Figure D*).

Now it's back to the scanner. I take my finished pencils and scan them into Photoshop. I like to work with 600 DPI images when it comes to my own work. From here I begin to clean up some of the line art, mainly getting rid of the non-photo blue pencil that I use, and some of the printed guidelines. I do this by opening up the Hue/Saturation box (**CTRL+U**) and selecting Cyan from the drop menu. I turn the saturation all the way down to -100 and the brightness all the way up to +100, then repeat this step selecting Blue.

I convert the image to grayscale by going to the Image menu and choosing Grayscale from the Mode options. I tweak the levels (**CTRL+L**), and save the image. My final step in preparing the pencils for inking is change the image from grayscale to duotone (I prefer using a red). Then I convert the whole image back to RGB one last time, and save it as a JPEG (*Figure E*).

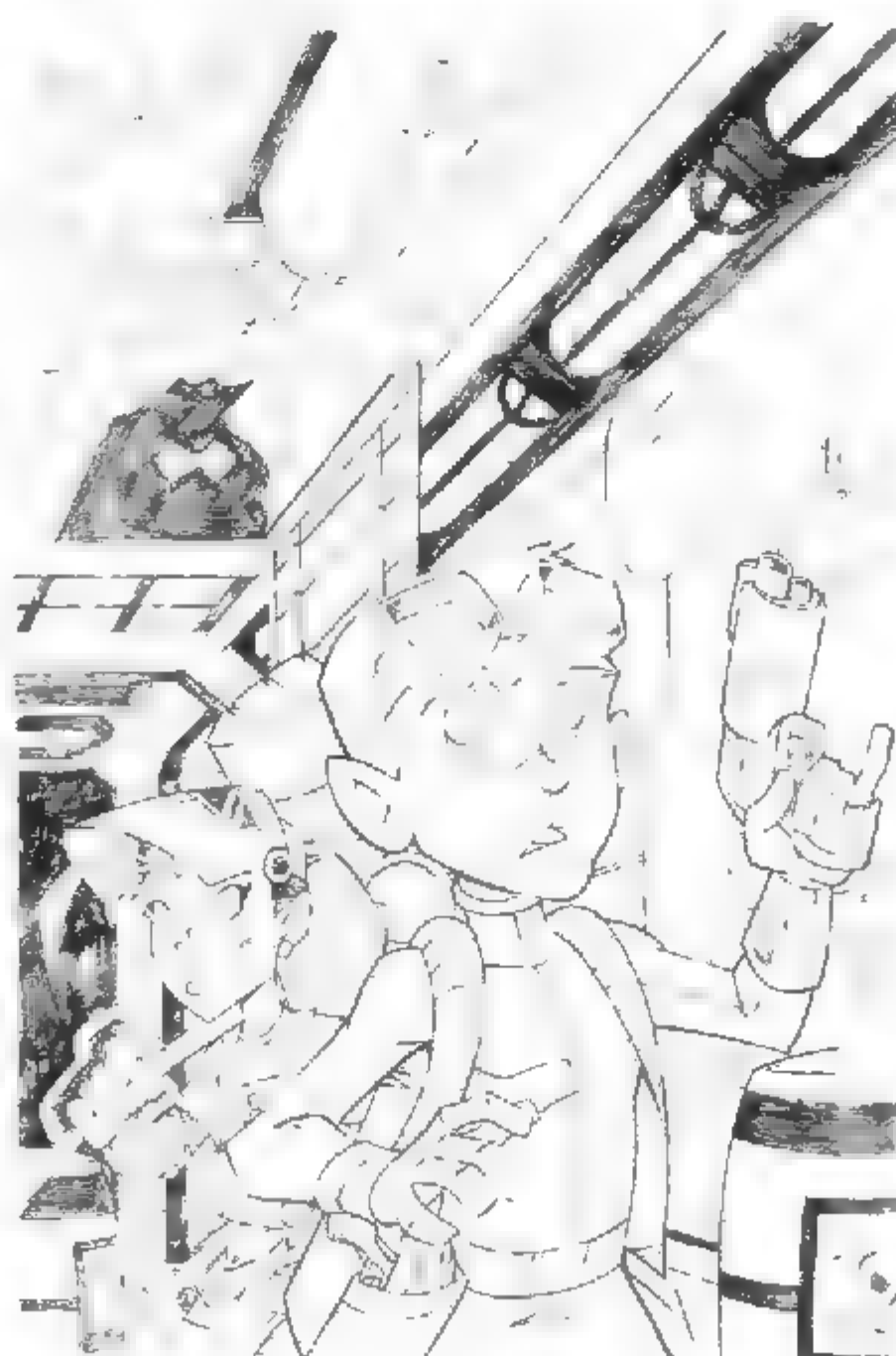


Fig. D



Fig.E





Fig. F



Fig. G



Fig. H

#### 4. Inks

For the past few years, I've been doing all of my inks digitally. Now I know what you're thinking (or at least I'm going to claim that I do): "Digital inks look so mechanical, so lifeless!"

I agree, digital inks *can* look mechanical if you don't adjust your settings to allow anything natural to come out. For example, I use Manga Studio for my inking. There I can use the pen tool (about the only tool I really use) and tweak the "correction" setting to allow a correction or smoothing of any line I draw. I usually keep mine set somewhere between 3 and 5 out of a possible 20. On occasion I'll bump the correction up to 7 for things such as capes, where I need long sweeping lines. This way I keep my ink lines looking and feeling about as organic as I can get without doing it traditionally. I've been asked numerous times why I ink digitally and one reason is this; when I color, I like to have nice clean lines to work with, and you can't always get that with traditional inks. The other reason is that I hate having to clean up after inking. This way there's no mess.

Depending on the project I'm working on, sometimes I'll only ink the characters and leave the backgrounds in pencil; such is the case with Carter Kain. I do this so I can get a look similar to an animated cell.

I open up a new "page" in Manga Studio sized at 10.53"x16.53", since that's the longest the page can be. Next, I import the red pencil JPEG into it, adjusting it to fit, and begin inking using the pen tool and my Wacom tablet. When I'm finished the inks look like this (Figure F).

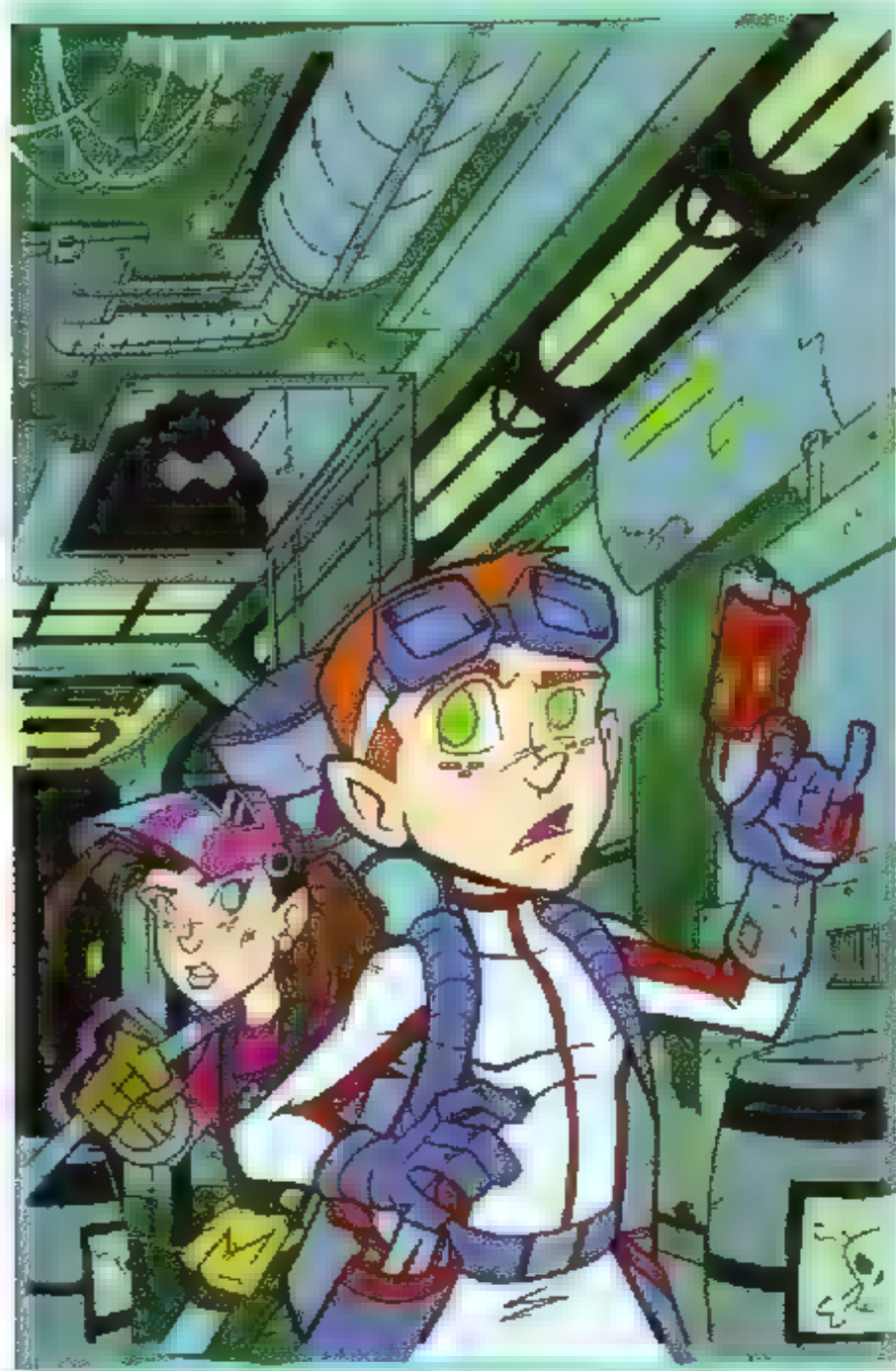
I then export the inks at 600 DPI and open them up in Photoshop. I also open up the "normal" finished pencils, and copy and paste the inks onto a new layer in the finished pencils file. I line up the inks over the pencils, making any necessary size changes, so that the inks are directly over the corresponding spots on the pencils. I erase the pencils from under the inks, as well as any other places on the pencils that need cleaning up. The end product looks like this (Figure G).

#### 5. Colors: Flats and Backgrounds

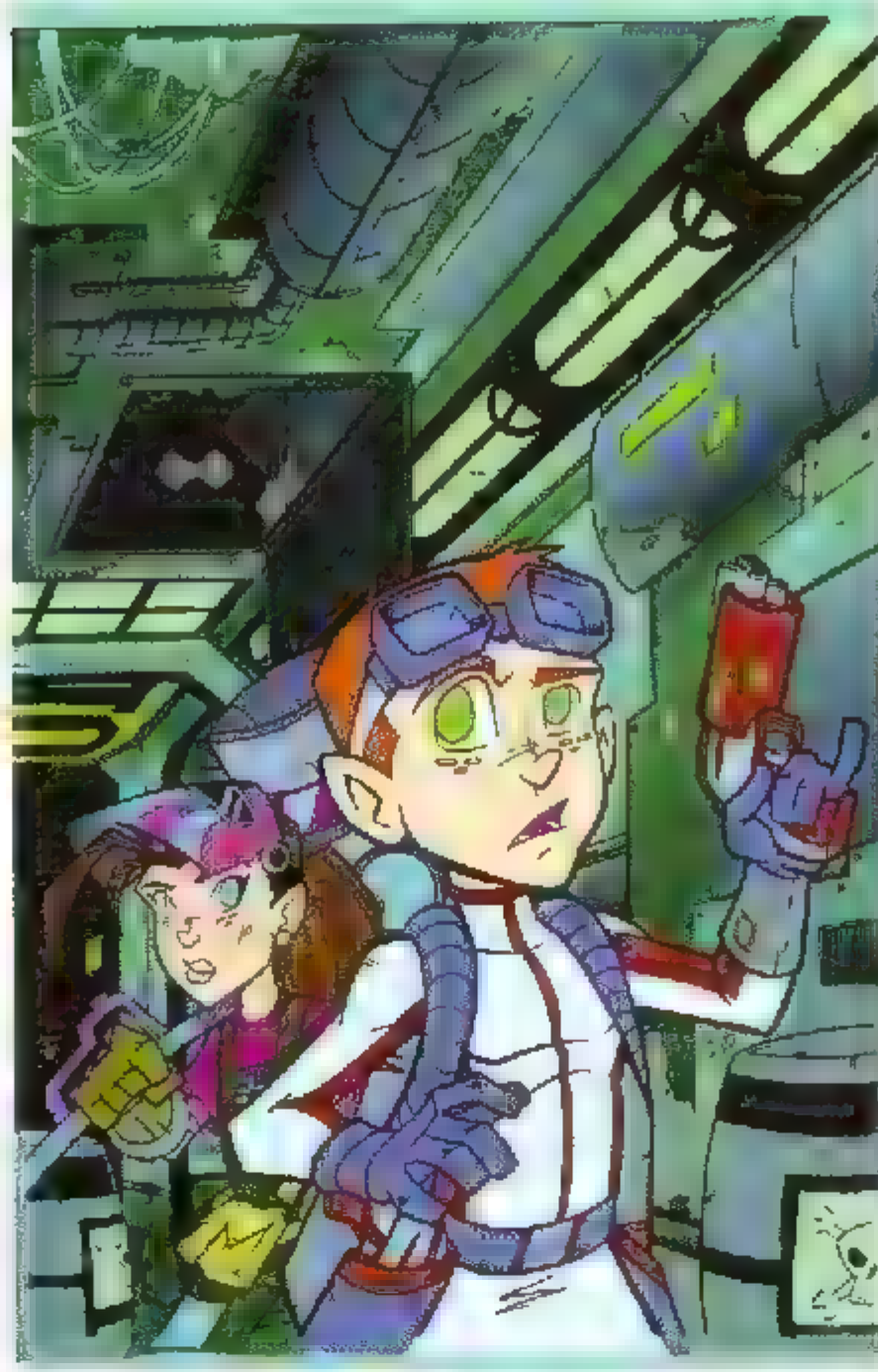
I'm finally ready to begin the coloring process. First I have to prep the line art for coloring. Right now the pencils and inks are on two separate layers, and I want them to stay that way. Since the inks layer is strictly for the black line art, I go to the Layers window and click the checkerboard icon under Lock to preserve transparent pixels.

Next I turn off the inks layer and go into the Channel window with the background layer active. I create an alpha channel, then with that channel active I hold down the CTRL key and click on the image thumbnail on the blue channel, which selects the line art, and then fill the alpha channel selection with white. I then deselect, CTRL+click on the alpha channel thumbnail, selecting the line art. Switching back to Layers. I create a new layer, inverse the selection and fill with black. Then I fill the old line art layer with white, since I now have the background line art on its own layer. While it takes a long time to explain, overall the process of getting the line art separate takes maybe 30 seconds, but it becomes second nature pretty quickly.





**Fig. I**



**Fig. J**



**Fig. K**

Now it's time to flat. I keep the flats for the characters on a separate layer from the background, keeping the colors for them separate as well. I start off with a base background color, keeping in mind the color theme or mood I've chosen. Since this cover has a creepy tone to it, I've chosen a green for an overall uneasy vibe. From here I continue flattening using colors that have a slight green tint to them. I then flat the characters using their standard colors; I'll tweak them later (Figure H page 59).

Since I'm going for more of an animated cell look with this project, I've been digitally painting my backgrounds, rather than using cuts and gradients. Making a new layer, I select one of the sections of colors I've flattened and pick two darker shades of that color for shadows and two lighter shades for highlights. I include a bit of blue in my darkest shade and a bit of yellow in my lightest shade. As for my brush, I try to stick with a hard, round brush set at 25% opacity and 80% flow. I then proceed to paint each section, repeating with each different color (Fig I, J, and K).

## 6. Colors: Line Art and Lighting

When the background's finished or nearly finished, I begin coloring the line art, making sure the "check-board" preserve transparency box is checked for its layer. I try to color the line art using a shade just a tad darker than the darkest shadow. I continue this until most of the background line art is colored (Figure L).

For the lights in the background, I take the base/flat color and select a much lighter shade. I choose the appropriate gradient type (usually a radial or reflective gradient) to make the lights appear as though they are glowing. I then color the line art to continue the look. On a new layer above the line art, I do a really light radial gradient, using the lightest color, to give a slight glow over top of small sections of the background, adding to the glow of the lights. (Figure M).



**Fig. L**



**Fig. M**



## 7. Colors: Characters

Now for the characters! Before I start coloring them, I first need to give them a green tint to keep with the overall scheme of the piece. I open up the Levels window (**CTRL+L**) and tweak the red, blue, and green channels till I've gotten the desired look. Then, on a new layer, I'll color the characters using a standard cell shading technique. Once I've gotten a part of the character colored, such as the skin, I'll take a slightly darker shade of the color I used for the shadows and do a light gradient of it (about 25%), darkest towards lightest, and add a slight highlight gradient to the non-shadowed part, repeating throughout until the characters are colored (*Figure N*). I apply the appropriate color holds to the character line art, and take care of any glowing parts on them, such as Sarah's hammer (*Figure O*).



Fig. N



Fig. O

## 8. Finishing Touches

I'm almost done. I show the image to my cohort Jeremy, both to get his opinion and to take advantage of a fresh set of eyes that can catch anything I might have missed. In this case, we agree that the silver on Carter's gun needs to be tweaked since it's blending into the background too much, and I missed a color hold on his goggles. I fix those items, trim the file up, and convert it to CMYK for printing. The cover is complete! (*Figure P*)

## Thank You for Visiting Nate's Brain

So there it is, that's my process. I'm sure there are quicker and easier ways to do some of the things I described here, but what can I say? That's how I roll. I hope you enjoyed your trip through my artistic process.

Sketch





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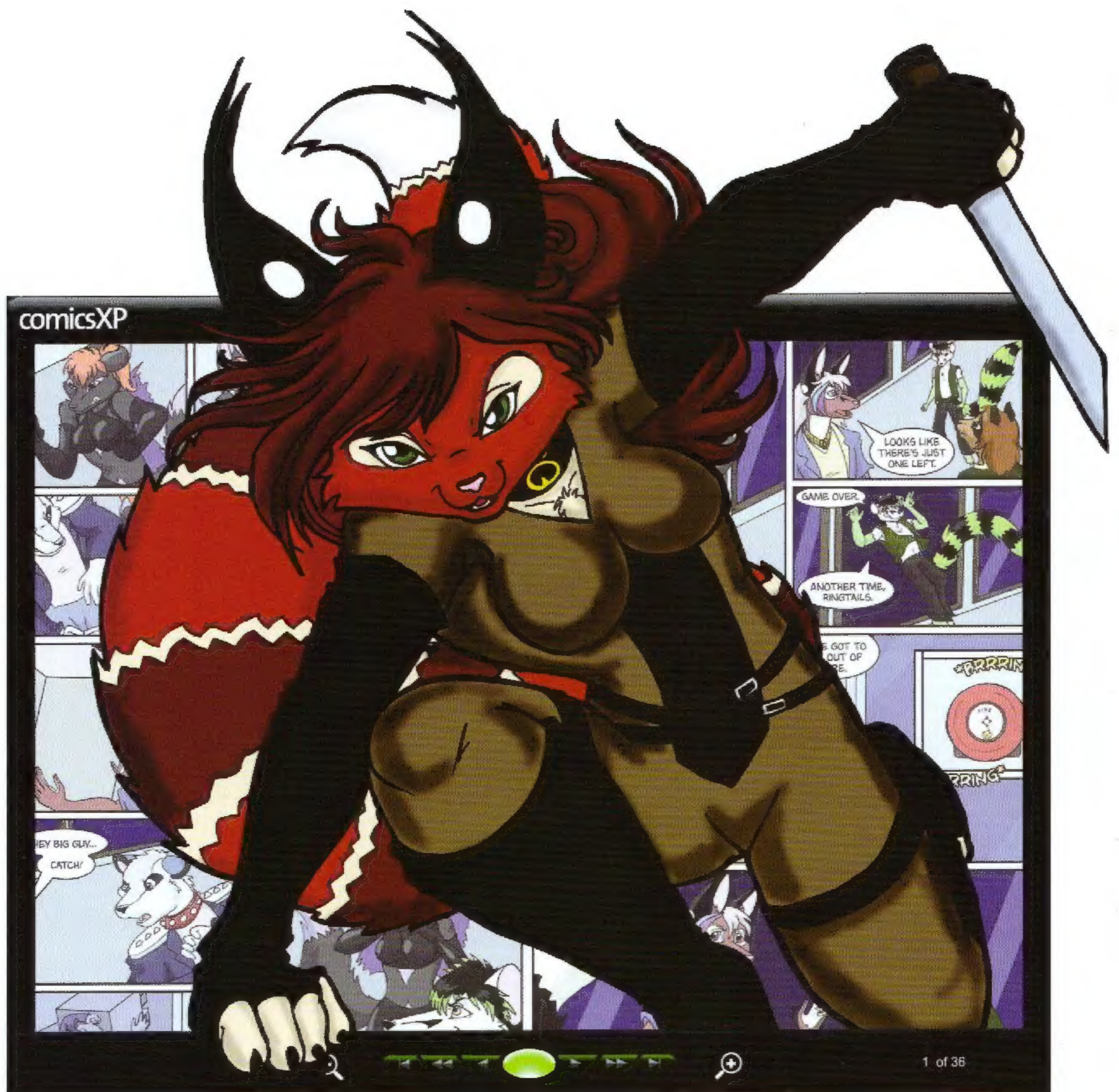
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